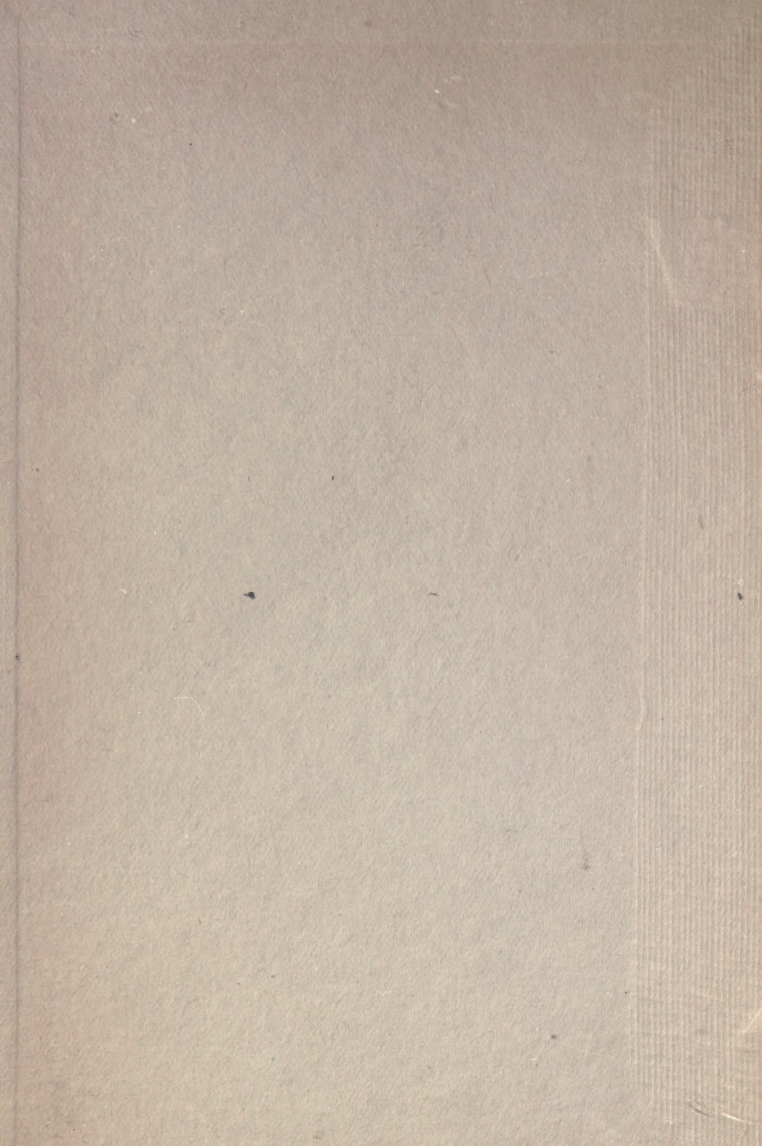


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THE SERVICE EDITION
OF
THE WORKS OF
RUDYARD KIPLING

ACTIONS AND REACTIONS

VOL. II



ACTIONS AND REACTIONS

BY
RUDYARD KIPLING

IN TWO VOLUMES
VOL. II

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A DEAL IN COTTON

A. R. Vol. II

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A DEAL IN COTTON

LONG and long ago, when Devadatta was King of Benares, I wrote some tales concerning Strickland of the Punjab Police (who married Miss Youghal), and Adam, his son. Strickland has finished his Indian Service, and lives now at a place in England called Weston-super-Mare, where his wife plays the organ in one of the churches. Semi-occasionally he comes up to London, and occasionally his wife makes him visit his friends. Otherwise he plays golf and follows the harriers for his figure's sake.

If you remember that Infant who told a tale to Eustace Cleever the novelist, you will remember that he became a baronet with a vast estate. He has, owing to cookery, a little lost his figure, but he never loses his friends. I have found a wing of his house turned into a hospital for sick men, and there I once spent a week in the company of two dismal nurses and a specialist in 'Sprue.' Another time the place was full of schoolboys—

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sons of Anglo-Indians—whom the Infant had collected for the holidays, and they nearly broke his keeper's heart.

But my last visit was better. The Infant called me up by wire, and I fell into the arms of a friend of mine, Colonel A. L. Corkran, so that the years departed from us, and we praised Allah, who had not yet terminated the Delights, nor separated the Companions.

Said Corkran, when he had explained how it felt to command a native Infantry regiment on the border: 'The Stricks are coming for to-night—with their boy.'

'I remember him. The little fellow I wrote a story about,' I said. 'Is he in the Service?'

'No. Strick got him into the Centro-Euro-Africo Protectorate. He's Assistant-Commissioner at Dupé—wherever that is. Somaliland, ain't it, Stalky?' asked the Infant.

Stalky puffed out his nostrils scornfully. 'You're only three thousand miles out. Look at the atlas.'

'Anyhow, he's as rotten full of fever as the rest of you,' said the Infant, at length on the big divan. 'And he's bringing a native servant with him. Stalky, be an athlete, and tell Ipps to put him in the stable room.'

'Why? Is he a Yao—like the fellow Wade

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brought here—when your housekeeper had fits?’ Stalky often visits the Infant, and has seen some odd things.

‘No. He’s one of old Strickland’s Punjabi policemen—and quite European—I believe.’

‘Hooray! Haven’t talked Punjabi for three months—and a Punjabi from Central Africa ought to be amusin’.’

We heard the chuff of the motor in the porch, and the first to enter was Agnes Strickland, whom the Infant makes no secret of adoring.

He is devoted, in a fat man’s placid way, to at least eight designing women; but she nursed him once through a bad bout of Peshawur fever, and when she is in the house, it is more than all hers.

‘You didn’t send rugs enough,’ she began. ‘Adam might have taken a chill.’

‘It’s quite warm in the tonneau. Why did you let him ride in front?’

‘Because he wanted to,’ she replied, with the mother’s smile, and we were introduced to the shadow of a young man leaning heavily on the shoulder of a bearded Punjabi Mohammedan.

‘That is all that came home of him,’ said his father to me. There was nothing in it of the child with whom I had journeyed to Dalhousie centuries since.

‘And what is this uniform?’ Stalky asked.



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Imam Din, the servant, who came to attention on the marble floor.

‘The uniform of the Protectorate troops, Sahib. Though I am the Little Sahib’s body-servant, it is not seemly for us white men to be attended by folk dressed altogether as servants.’

‘And—and you white men wait at table on horseback?’ Stalky pointed to the man’s spurs.

‘These I added for the sake of honour when I came to England,’ said Imam Din.

Adam smiled the ghost of a little smile that I began to remember, and we put him on the big couch for refreshments. Stalky asked him how much leave he had, and he said ‘Six months.’

‘But he’ll take another six on medical certificate,’ said Agnes anxiously. Adam knit his brows.

‘You don’t want to—eh? I know. Wonder what my second in command is doing.’ Stalky tugged his moustache, and fell to thinking of his Sikhs.

‘Ah!’ said the Infant. ‘I’ve only a few thousand pheasants to look after. Come along and dress for dinner. We’re just ourselves. What flowers is your honour’s ladyship commanding for the table?’

‘Just ourselves?’ she said, looking at the crotons in the great hall. ‘Then let’s have marigolds—the little cemetery ones.’

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So it was ordered.

Now, marigolds to us mean hot weather, discomfort, parting, and death. That smell in our nostrils, and Adam's servant in waiting, we naturally fell back more and more on the old slang, recalling at each glass those who had gone before. We did not sit at the big table, but in the bay window overlooking the park, where they were carting the last of the hay. When twilight fell we would not have candles, but waited for the moon, and continued our talk in the dusk that makes one remember.

Young Adam was not interested in our past except where it had touched his future. I think his mother held his hand beneath the table. Imam Din—shoeless, out of respect to the floors—brought him his medicine, poured it drop by drop, and asked for orders.

'Wait to take him to his cot when he grows weary,' said his mother, and Imam Din retired into the shadow by the ancestral portraits.

'Now what d'you expect to get *out* of your country?' the Infant asked, when—our India laid aside—we talked Adam's Africa. It roused him at once.

'Rubber—nuts—gums—and so on,' he said. 'But our real future is cotton. I grew fifty acres of it last year in my District.'

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'My District!' said his father. 'Hear him, Mummy!'

'I did though! I wish I could show you the sample. Some Manchester chaps said it was as good as any Sea Island cotton on the market.'

'But what made you a cotton-planter, my son?' she asked.

'My Chief said every man ought to have a *shouk* (a hobby) of sorts, and he took the trouble to ride a day out of his way to show me a belt of black soil that was just the thing for cotton.'

'Ah! What was your Chief like?' Stalky asked, in his silkiest tones.

'The best man alive—absolutely. He lets you blow your own nose yourself. The people call him'—Adam jerked out some heathen phrase—'that means the Man with the Stone Eyes, you know.'

'I'm glad of that. Because I've heard—from other quarters'—Stalky's sentence burned like a slow match, but the explosion was not long delayed.

'Other quarters!' Adam threw out a thin hand. 'Every dog has his fleas. If you listen to *them*, of course!' The shake of his head was as I remembered it among his father's policemen twenty years before, and his mother's eyes shining

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through the dusk called on me to adore it. I kicked Stalky on the shin. One must not mock a young man's first love or loyalty.

A lump of raw cotton appeared on the table.

'I thought there might be a need. Therefore I packed it between our shirts,' said the voice of Imam Din.

'Does he know as much English as that?' cried the Infant, who had forgotten his East.

We all admired the cotton for Adam's sake, and, indeed, it was very long and glossy.

'It's—it's only an experiment,' he said. 'We're such awful paupers we can't even pay for a mail-cart in my District. We use a biscuit box on two bicycle wheels. I only got the money for that'—he patted the stuff—'by a pure fluke.'

'How much did it cost?' asked Strickland.

'With seed and machinery—about two hundred pounds. I had the labour done by cannibals.'

'That sounds promising.' Stalky reached for a fresh cigarette.

'No, thank you,' said Agnes. 'I've been at Weston-super-Mare a little too long for cannibals. I'll go to the music-room and try over next Sunday's hymns.'

She lifted the boy's hand lightly to her lips, and tripped across the acres of glimmering floor to the music-room that had been the Infant's

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ancestors' banqueting hall. Her grey and silver dress disappeared under the musicians' gallery; two electrics broke out, and she stood backed against the lines of gilded pipes.

'There's an abominable self-playing attachment here!' she called.

'Me!' the Infant answered, his napkin on his shoulder. 'That's how I play *Parsifal*.'

'I prefer the direct expression. Take it away, Ipps.'

We heard old Ipps skating obediently all over the floor.

'Now for the direct expression,' said Stalky, and moved on the Burgundy recommended by the faculty to enrich fever-thinned blood.

'It's nothing much. Only the belt of cotton-soil my Chief showed me ran right into the Sheshaheli country. We haven't been able to prove cannibalism against that tribe in the courts; but when a Sheshaheli offers you four pounds of woman's breast, tattoo marks and all, skewered up in a plantain leaf before breakfast, you——'

'Naturally burn the villages before lunch,' said Stalky.

Adam shook his head. 'No troops,' he sighed. 'I told my Chief about it, and he said we must wait till they chopped a white man. He advised me if ever I felt like it not to commit a—a barren

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felo de se, but to let the Sheshaheli do it. Then he could report, and then we could mop 'em up!'

'Most immoral! That's how we got——' Stalky quoted the name of a province won by just such a sacrifice.

'Yes, but the beasts dominated one end of my cotton-belt like anything. They chivied me out of it when I went to take soil for analysis—me and Imam Din.'

'Sahib! Is there a need?' The voice came out of the darkness, and the eyes shone over Adam's shoulder ere it ceased.

'None. The name was taken in talk.' Adam abolished him with a turn of the finger. 'I couldn't make a *casus belli* of it just then, because my Chief had taken all the troops to hammer a gang of slave kings up north. Did you ever hear of our war against Ibn Makarrah? He precious nearly lost us the Protectorate at one time, though he's an ally of ours now.'

'Wasn't he rather a pernicious brute, even as they go?' said Stalky. 'Wade told me about him last year.'

'Well, his nickname all through the country was "The Merciful," and he didn't get *that* for nothing. None of our people ever breathed his proper name. They said "He" or "That One,"

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and they didn't say it aloud, either. He fought us for eight months.'

'I remember. There was a paragraph about it in one of the papers,' I said.

'We broke him, though. No—the slavers don't come our way, because our men have the reputation of dying too much, the first month after they're captured. That knocks down profits, you see.'

'What about your charming friends, the Sheshahelis?' said the Infant.

'There's no market for Sheshahelis. People would as soon buy crocodiles. I believe, before we annexed the country, Ibn Makarra had dropped down on 'em once—to train his young men—and simply hewed 'em in pieces. The bulk of my people are agriculturists—just the right stamp for cotton-growers. . . . What's Mother playing?—"*Once in royal*"?''

The organ that had been crooning as happily as a woman over her babe restored, steadied to a tune.

'Magnificent! Oh, magnificent!' said the Infant loyally. I had never heard him sing but once, and then, though it was early in the tolerant morning, his mess had rolled him into a lotus pond.

'How did you get your cannibals to work for you?' asked Strickland.

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‘They got converted to civilisation after my Chief smashed Ibn Makarra—just at the time I wanted ’em. You see my Chief had promised me in writing that if I could scrape up a surplus he would not bag it for his roads this time, but I might have it for my cotton-play. I only needed two hundred pounds. Our revenues didn’t run to it.’

‘What is your revenue?’ Stalky asked in the vernacular.

‘With hut-tax, traders’, game and mining licences, not more than fourteen thousand rupees; every penny of it ear-marked months ahead.’ Adam sighed.

‘Also there is a fine for dogs straying in the Sahib’s camp. Last year it exceeded three rupees,’ Imam Din said quietly.

‘Well, I thought that was fair. They howled so. We were rather strict on fines. I worked up my native clerk—Bulaki Ram—to a ferocious pitch of enthusiasm. He used to calculate the profits of our cotton-scheme to three points of decimals, after office. I tell you I envied your magistrates here hauling money out of motorists every week! I had managed to make our ordinary revenue and expenditure just about meet, and I was crazy to get the odd two hundred pounds for my cotton. That sort of thing grows on a chap when he’s alone—and talks aloud!’

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‘Hul-lo! Have you been there already?’ the father said, and Adam nodded.

‘Yes. Used to spout what I could remember of *Marmion* to a tree, sir. Well *then* my luck turned. One evening an English-speaking nigger came in towing a corpse by the feet. (You get used to little things like that.) He said he’d found it, and please would I identify, because if it was one of Ibn Makarra’s men there might be a reward. It was an old Mohammedan, with a strong dash of Arab—a small-boned, bald-headed chap, and I was just wondering how it had kept so well in our climate when it sneezed. You ought to have seen the nigger! He fetched a howl and bolted like—like the dog in *Tom Sawyer*, when he sat on the what’s-its-name beetle. He yelped as he ran, and the corpse went on sneezing. I could see it had been *sarkied*. (That’s a sort of gum-poison, pater, which attacks the nerve centres. Our chief medical officer is writing a monograph about it.) So Imam Din and I emptied out the corpse one time, with my shaving soap and trade gunpowder, and hot water.

‘I’d seen a case of *sarkie* before; so when the skin peeled off his feet, and he stopped sneezing, I knew he’d live. He *was* bad, though. ‘Lay like a log for a week while Imam Din and I massaged the paralysis out of him. Then he told us he was

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a Hajji—had been three times to Mecca—come in from French Africa, and that he'd met the nigger by the wayside—just like a case of *thuggee*, in India—and the nigger had poisoned him. That seemed reasonable enough by what I knew of Coast niggers.'

'You believed him?' said his father keenly.

'There was no reason I shouldn't. The nigger never came back, and the old man stayed with me for two months,' Adam returned. 'You know what the best type of a Mohammedan gentleman can be, pater? He was that.'

'None finer, none finer,' was the answer.

'Except a Sikh,' Stalky grunted.

'He'd been to Bombay; he knew French Africa inside out; he could quote poetry and the Koran all day long. He played chess—you don't know what that meant to me—like a master. We used to talk about the regeneration of Turkey and the Sheik-ul-Islam between moves. Oh, everything under the sun we talked about! He was awfully open-minded. He believed in slavery, of course, but he quite saw that it would have to die out. That's why he agreed with me about developing the resources of the district—by cotton-growing, you know.'

'You talked that too?' said Strickland.

'Rather. We discussed it for hours. You

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don't know what it meant to me. A wonderful man. Imam Din, was not our Hajji marvellous?'

'Most marvellous! It was all through the Hajji that we found the money for our cotton-play.' Imam Din had moved, I fancy, behind Strickland's chair.

'Yes. It must have been dead against his convictions too. He brought me news when I was down with fever at Dupé that one of Ibn Makarrah's men was parading through my District with a bunch of slaves—in the Fork!'

'What's the matter with the Fork, that you can't abide it?' said Stalky. Adam's voice had risen at the last word.

'Local etiquette, sir,' he replied, too earnest to notice Stalky's atrocious pun. 'If a slaver runs slaves through British territory he ought to pretend that they're his servants. Hawkin' 'em about in the Fork—the forked stick that you put round their necks, you know—is insolence—same as not backing your topsails in the old days. Besides, it unsettles the district.'

'I thought you said slavers didn't come your way,' I put in.

'They don't. But my Chief was smoking 'em out of the North all that season, and they were bolting into French territory any road they could find. My orders were to take no notice so long

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as they circulated, but open slave-dealing in—the—Fork, was too much. I couldn't go myself, so I told a couple of our Makalali police and Imam Din to make talk with the gentlemen one time. It was rather risky, and it might have been expensive, but it turned up trumps. They were back in a few days with the slaver (he didn't show fight) and a whole crowd of witnesses, and we tried him in my bedroom, and fined him properly. Just to show you how demoralised the brute must have been (Arabs often go dotty after a defeat), he'd snapped up four or five utterly useless Sheshahelis, and was offering 'em to all and sundry along the road. Why, he offered 'em to you, didn't he, Imam Din?'

'I was witness that he offered man-eaters for sale,' said Imam Din.

'Luckily for my cotton-scheme, that landed him both ways. You see, he had slaved *and* exposed slaves for sale in British territory. That meant the double fine if I could get it out of him.'

'What was his defence?' said Strickland, late of the Punjab police.

'As far as I remember—but I had a temperature of 104 degrees at the time—he'd mistaken the meridians of longitude. Thought he was in French territory. Said he'd never do it again, if we'd let him off with a fine. I could have shaken



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hands with the brute for that. He paid up cash like a motorist and went off one time.'

'Did you see him?'

'Ye-es. Didn't I, Imam Din?'

'Assuredly the Sahib both saw and spoke to the slaver. And the Sahib also made a speech to the man-eaters when he freed them, and they swore to supply him with labour for all his cotton-play. The Sahib leaned on his own servant's shoulder the while.'

'I remember something of that. I remember Bulaki Ram giving me the papers to sign, and I distinctly remember him locking up the money in the safe—two hundred and ten beautiful English sovereigns. You don't know what that meant to me! I believe it cured my fever; and as soon as I could I staggered off with the Hajji to interview the Sheshaheli about labour. *Then* I found out why they had been so keen to work! It wasn't gratitude. Their big village had been hit by lightning and burned out a week or two before, and they lay flat in rows around me asking me for a job. I gave it 'em.'

'And so you were very happy?' His mother had stolen up behind us. 'You liked your cotton, dear?' She tidied the lump away.

'By Jove, I was happy,' Adam yawned. 'Now if any one'—he looked at the Infant—'cares to

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put a little money into the scheme, it'll be the making of my District. I can't give you figures, sir, but I assure——'

'You'll take your arsenic, and Imam Din'll take you up to bed, and I'll come and tuck you in.'

Agnes leaned forward, her rounded elbows on his shoulders, hands joined across his dark hair, and—'Isn't he a darling?' she said to us, with just the same heart-rending lift of the left eyebrow and the same break of her voice as sent Strickland mad among the horses in the year '84. We were quiet when they were gone. We waited till Imam Din returned to us from above and coughed at the door, as only dark-hearted Asia can.

'Now,' said Strickland, 'tell us what truly befell, son of my servant.'

'All befell as our Sahib has said. Only—only there was an arrangement—a little arrangement on account of his cotton-play.'

'Tell! Sit! I *beg* your pardon, Infant,' said Strickland.

But the Infant had already made the sign, and we heard Imam Din hunker down on the floor. One gets little out of the East at attention.

'When the fever came on our Sahib in our roofed house at Dupé,' he began, 'the Hajji listened intently to his talk. He expected the

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names of women ; though I had already told him that Our virtue was beyond belief or compare, and that Our sole desire was this cotton-play. Being at last convinced, the Hajji breathed on our Sahib's forehead, to sink into his brain, news concerning a slave-dealer in his district who had made a mock of the law. Sahib, Imam Din turned to Strickland, 'our Sahib answered to those false words as a horse of blood answers to the spur. He sat up. He issued orders for the apprehension of the slave-dealer. Then he fell back. Then we left him.'

'Alone—servant of my son, and son of my servant?' said his father.

'There was an old woman which belonged to the Hajji. She had come in with the Hajji's money-belt. The Hajji told her that if our Sahib died, she would die with him. And truly our Sahib had given me orders to depart.'

'Being mad with fever—eh?'

'What could we do, Sahib? This cotton-play was his heart's desire. He talked of it in his fever. Therefore it was his heart's desire that the Hajji went to fetch. Doubtless the Hajji could have given him money enough out of hand for ten cotton-plays, but in this respect also our Sahib's virtue was beyond belief or compare. Great Ones do not exchange moneys. Therefore the Hajji said—and I helped with my counsel—that we

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must make arrangements to get the money in all respects conformable with the English Law. It was great trouble to us, but—the Law is the Law. And the Hajji showed the old woman the knife by which she would die if our Sahib died. So I accompanied the Hajji.'

'Knowing who he was?' said Strickland.

'No! Fearing the man. A virtue went out from him overbearing the virtue of lesser persons. The Hajji told Bulaki Ram the clerk to occupy the seat of government at Dupé till our return. Bulaki Ram feared the Hajji, because the Hajji had often gloatingly appraised his skill in figures at five thousand rupees upon any slave block. The Hajji then said to me: "Come, and we will make the man-eaters play the cotton-game for my delight's delight." The Hajji loved our Sahib with the love of a father for his son, of a saved for his saviour, of a Great One for a Great One. But I said: "We cannot go to that Sheshaheli place without a hundred rifles. We have here five." The Hajji said: "I have untied a knot in my head-handkerchief which will be more to us than a thousand." I saw that he had so loosed it that it lay flagwise on his shoulder. Then I knew that he was a Great One with virtue in him.

'We came to the highlands of the Sheshaheli

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on the dawn of the second day—about the time of the stirring of the cold wind. The Hajji walked delicately across the open place where their filth is, and scratched upon the gate which was shut. When it opened I saw the man-eaters lying on their cots under the eaves of the huts. They rolled off: they rose up, one behind the other the length of the street, and the fear on their faces was as leaves whitening to a breeze. The Hajji stood in the gate guarding his skirts from defilement. The Hajji said: "I am here once again. Give me six and yoke up." They zealously then pushed to us with poles six, and yoked them with a heavy tree. The Hajji then said: "Fetch fire from the morning hearth, and come to windward." The wind is strong on those headlands at sunrise, so when each had emptied his crock of fire in front of that which was before him, the broadside of the town roared into flame, and all went. The Hajji then said: "At the end of a time there will come here the white man ye once chased for sport. He will demand labour to plant such and such stuff. Ye are that labour, and your spawn after you." They said, lifting their heads a very little from the edge of the ashes: "We are that labour, and our spawn after us." The Hajji said: "What is also my name?" They said: "Thy name is also The Merciful." The Hajji said: "Praise then my

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mercy"; and while they did this, the Hajji walked away, I following.'

The Infant made some noise in his throat, and reached for more Burgundy.

'About noon one of our six fell dead. Fright—only fright, Sahib! None had—none could—touch him. Since they were in pairs, and the other of the Fork was mad and sang foolishly, we waited for some heathen to do what was needful. There came at last Angari men with goats. The Hajji said: "What do ye see?" They said: "Oh, our Lord, we neither see nor hear." The Hajji said: "But I command ye to see and to hear and to say." They said: "Oh, our Lord, it is to our commanded eyes as though slaves stood in a Fork." The Hajji said: "So testify before the officer who waits you in the town of Dupé." They said: "What shall come to us after?" The Hajji said: "The just reward for the informer. But if ye do *not* testify, then a punishment which shall cause birds to fall from the trees in terror and monkeys to scream for pity." Hearing this, the Angari men hastened to Dupé. The Hajji then said to me: "Are those things sufficient to establish our case, or must I drive in a village full?" I said that three witnesses amply established any case, but as yet, I said, the Hajji had not offered his slaves for sale. It is true, as our

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Sahib said just now, there is one fine for catching slaves, and yet another for making to sell them. And it was the double fine that we needed, Sahib, for our Sahib's cotton-play. We had fore-arranged all this with Bulaki Ram, who knows the English Law, and I thought the Hajji remembered, but he grew angry, and cried out: "O God, Refuge of the Afflicted, must I, who am what I am, peddle this dog's meat by the roadside to gain his delight for my heart's delight?" None the less, he admitted it was the English Law, and so he offered me the six—five—in a small voice, with an averted head. The Sheshaheli do not smell of sour milk as heathen should. They smell like leopards, Sahib. This is because they eat men.'

'Maybe,' said Strickland. 'But where were *thy* wits? One witness is not sufficient to establish the fact of a sale.'

'What could we do, Sahib? There was the Hajji's reputation to consider. We could not have called in a heathen witness for such a thing. And, moreover, the Sahib forgets that the defendant himself was making this case. He would not contest his own evidence. Otherwise I know the law of evidence well enough.

'So then we went to Dupé, and while Bulaki Ram waited among the Angari men, I ran to see

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our Sahib in bed. His eyes were very bright, and his mouth was full of upside-down orders, but the old woman had not loosened her hair for death. The Hajji said: "Be quick with my trial. I am not Job!" The Hajji was a learned man. We made the trial swiftly to a sound of soothing voices round the bed. Yet—*yet*, because no man can be sure whether a Sahib of that blood sees, or does not see, we made it strictly in the manner of the forms of the English Law. Only the witnesses and the slaves and the prisoner we kept without for his nose's sake.'

'Then he did not see the prisoner?' said Strickland.

'I stood by to shackle up an Angari in case he should demand it, but by God's favour he was too far fevered to ask for one. It is quite true he signed the papers. It is quite true he saw the money put away in the safe—two hundred and ten English pounds—and it is quite true that the gold wrought on him as a strong cure. But as to his seeing the prisoner, and having speech with the man-eaters—the Hajji breathed all that on his forehead to sink into his sick brain. A little, as ye have heard, has remained. . . . Ah, but when the fever broke, and our Sahib called for the fine-book, and the thin little picture-books from Europe with the pictures of plows and hoes,

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and cotton-mills—ah, then he laughed as he used to laugh, Sahib. It was his heart's desire, this cotton-play. The Hajji loved him, as who does not? It was a little, little arrangement, Sahib, of which—is it necessary to tell all the world?’

‘And when didst thou know who the Hajji was?’ said Strickland.

‘Not for a certainty till he and our Sahib had returned from their visit to the Sheshaheli country. It is quite true as our Sahib says, the man-eaters lay flat around his feet, and asked for spades to cultivate cotton. That very night, when I was cooking the dinner, the Hajji said to me: “I go to my own place, though God knows whether the Man with the Stone Eyes have left me an ox, a slave, or a woman.” I said: “Thou art then *That One*?” The Hajji said: “I am ten thousand rupees reward into thy hand. Shall we make another law case and get more cotton-machines for the boy?” I said: “What dog am I to do this? May God prolong thy life a thousand years!” The Hajji said: “Who has seen to-morrow? God has given me as it were a son in my old age, and I praise Him. See that the breed is not lost!”

‘He walked then from the cooking-place to our Sahib’s office-table under the tree, where our Sahib held in his hand a blue envelope of Service

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newly come in by runner from the North. At this, fearing evil news for the Hajji, I would have restrained him, but he said: "We be both Great Ones. Neither of us will fail." Our Sahib looked up to invite the Hajji to approach before he opened the letter, but the Hajji stood off till our Sahib had well opened and well read the letter. Then the Hajji said: "Is it permitted to say farewell?" Our Sahib stabbed the letter on the file with a deep and joyful breath and cried a welcome. The Hajji said: "I go to my own place," and he loosed from his neck a chained heart of ambergris set in soft gold and held it forth. Our Sahib snatched it swiftly in the closed fist, down turned, and said: "If thy name be written hereon, it is needless, for a name is already engraved on my heart." The Hajji said: "And on mine also is a name engraved; but there is no name on the amulet." The Hajji stooped to our Sahib's feet, but our Sahib raised and embraced him, and the Hajji covered his mouth with his shoulder-cloth, because it worked, and so he went away.'

'And what order was in the Service letter?'

Stalky murmured.

'Only an order for our Sahib to write a report on some new cattle sickness. But all orders come in the same make of envelope. We could not tell what order it might have been.'

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‘When he opened the letter—my son—made he no sign? A cough? An oath?’ Strickland asked.

‘None, Sahib. I watched his hands. They did not shake. Afterward he wiped his face, but he was sweating before from the heat.’

‘Did he know? Did he know who the Hajji was?’ said the Infant in English.

‘I am a poor man. Who can say what a Sahib of that get knows or does not know? But the Hajji is right. The breed should not be lost. It is not *very* hot for little children in Dupé, and as regards nurses, my sister’s cousin at Jull——’

‘H’m! That is the boy’s own concern. I wonder if his Chief ever knew?’ said Strickland.

‘Assuredly,’ said Imam Din. ‘On the night before our Sahib went down to the sea, the Great Sahib—the Man with the Stone Eyes—dined with him in his camp, I being in charge of the table. They talked a long while and the Great Sahib said: “What didst thou think of *That One*?” (*We do not say Ibn Makarrah yonder.*) Our Sahib said: “Which one?” The Great Sahib said: “That One which taught thy man-eaters to grow cotton for thee. He was in thy District three months to my certain knowledge, and I looked by every runner

A DEAL IN COTTON

that thou wouldst send me in his head." Our Sahib said: "If his head had been needed, another man should have been appointed to govern my District, for he was my friend." The Great Sahib laughed and said: "If I had needed a lesser man in thy place be sure I would have sent him, as, if I had needed the head of That One, be sure I would have sent men to bring it to me. But tell me now, by what means didst thou twist him to thy use and our profit in this cotton-play?" Our Sahib said: "By God, I did not use that man in any fashion whatever. He was my friend." The Great Sahib said: "*Toh Vau!* (Bosh!) Tell!" Our Sahib shook his head as he does—as he did when a child—and they looked at each other like sword-play men in the ring at a fair. The Great Sahib dropped his eyes first and he said: "So be it. I should perhaps have answered thus in my youth. No matter. I have made treaty with That One as an ally of the State. Some day he shall tell me the tale." Then I brought in fresh coffee, and they ceased. But I do not think That One will tell the Great Sahib more than our Sahib told him.'

'Wherefore?' I asked.

'Because they are both Great Ones, and I have observed in my life that Great Ones employ words very little between each other in their dealings;

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still less when they speak to a third concerning those dealings. Also they profit by silence. . . . Now I think that the mother has come down from the room, and I will go rub his feet till he sleeps.'

His ears had caught Agnes's step at the stair-head, and presently she passed us on her way to the music-room humming the *Magnificat*.

THE NEW KNIGHTHOOD

Who gives him the Bath ?

‘I,’ said the wet,
‘Rank Jungle-sweat,
I’ll give him the Bath !’

Who’ll sing the psalms ?

‘We,’ said the Palms.
‘Ere the hot wind becalms,
We’ll sing the psalms.’

Who lays on the sword ?

‘I,’ said the Sun,
‘Before he has done,
I’ll lay on the sword.’

Who fastens his belt ?

‘I,’ said Short-Rations,
‘I know all the fashions
Of tightening a belt !’

Who buckles his spur ?

‘I,’ said his Chief,
Exacting and brief,
‘I’ll give him the spur.’

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Who'll shake his hand ?

‘I,’ said the Fever,

‘And I’m no deceiver,

I’ll shake his hand.’

Who brings him the wine ?

‘I,’ said Quinine,

‘It’s a habit of mine,

I’ll come with his wine.’

Who’ll put him to proof ?

‘I,’ said All Earth,

‘Whatever he’s worth,

I’ll put to the proof.’

Who’ll choose him for Knight ?

‘I,’ said his Mother,

‘Before any other,

My very own knight !’

And after this fashion, adventure to seek,

Was Sir Galahad made—as it might be last week.

THE PUZZLER

THE PUZZLER

I HAD not seen Penfentenyou since the Middle Nineties, when he was Minister of Ways and Woodsides in De Thouar's first Administration. Last summer, though he nominally held the same portfolio, he was his Colony's Premier in all but name, and the idol of his own province, which is two and a half times the size of England. Politically, his creed was his growing country; and he came over to England to develop a Great Idea in her behalf.

Believing that he had put it in train, I made haste to welcome him to my house for a week.

That he was chased to my door by his own Agent-General in a motor; that they turned my study into a Cabinet Meeting which I was not invited to attend; that the local telegraph all but broke down beneath the strain of hundredword coded cables; and that I practically broke into the house of a stranger to get him telephonic

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facilities on a Sunday, are things I overlook. What I objected to was his ingratitude, while I thus tore up England to help him. So I said: 'Why on earth didn't you see your Opposite Number in Town instead of bringing your office work here?'

'Eh? Who?' said he, looking up from his fourth cable since lunch.

'See the English Minister for Ways and Wood-sides.'

'I saw him,' said Penfentyou, without enthusiasm.

It seemed that he had called twice on the gentleman, but without an appointment—('I thought if I wasn't big enough, my business was')—and each time had found him engaged. A third party intervening, suggested that a meeting might be arranged if due notice were given.

'Then,' said Penfentyou, 'I called at the office at ten o'clock.'

'But they'd be in bed,' I cried.

'One of the babies was awake. He told me that—that "my sort of questions"'—he slapped the pile of cables—'were only taken between 11 and 2 p.m. So I waited.'

'And when you got to business?' I asked.

He made a gesture of despair. 'It was like talking to children. They'd never heard of it.'

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‘And your Opposite Number?’

Penfentenyou described him.

‘Hush! You mustn’t talk like that!’ I shuddered. ‘He’s one of the best of good fellows. You should meet him socially.’

‘I’ve done that too,’ he said. ‘Have you?’

‘Heaven forbid!’ I cried; ‘but that’s the proper thing to say.’

‘Oh, he said all the proper things. Only I thought as this was England that they’d more or less have the hang of all the—general hang-together of my Idea. But I had to explain it from the beginning.’

‘Ah! They’d probably mislaid the papers,’ I said, and I told him the story of a three-million pound insurrection caused by a deputy Under-Secretary sitting upon a mass of green-labelled correspondence instead of reading it.

‘I wonder it doesn’t happen every week,’ he answered. ‘D’you mind my having the Agent-General to dinner again to-night? I’ll wire, and he can motor down.’

The Agent-General arrived two hours later—a patient and expostulating person, visibly torn between the pulling Devil of a rampant Colony, and the placid Baker of a largely uninterested England. But with Penfentenyou behind him



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he had worked; for he told us that Lord Lundie—the Law Lord—was the final authority on the legal and constitutional aspects of the Great Idea, and to him it must be referred.

‘Good Heavens alive!’ thundered Penfentenyou. ‘I told you to get *that* settled last Christmas.’

‘It was the middle of the house-party season,’ said the Agent-General mildly. ‘Lord Lundie’s at Credence Green now—he spends his holidays there. It’s only forty miles off.’

‘Shan’t I disturb his Holiness?’ said Penfentenyou heavily. ‘Perhaps “my sort of questions,”’ he snorted, ‘mayn’t be discussed except at midnight.’

‘Oh, don’t be a child,’ I said.

‘What this country needs,’ said Penfentenyou, ‘is’—and for ten minutes he trumpeted rebellion.

‘What you need is to pay for your own protection’ I cut in when he drew breath, and I showed him a yellowish paper, supplied gratis by Government, which is called Schedule D. To my merciless delight he had never seen the thing before, and I completed my victory over him and all the Colonies with a Brassey’s *Naval Annual* and a *Statesman’s Year Book*.

The Agent-General interposed with agent-generalities (but they were merely provocateurs) about Ties of Sentiment.

THE PUZZLER

'They be blowed!' said Penfentyou. 'What's the good of sentiment towards a Kindergarten?'

'Quite so. Ties of common funk are the things that bind us together; and the sooner you new nations realise it the better. What you need is an annual invasion. Then you'd grow up.'

'Thank you! Thank you!' said the Agent-General. 'That's what I am always trying to tell my people.'

'But, my dear fool,' Penfentyou almost wept, 'do you pretend that these banana-fingered amateurs at home *are* grown up?'

'You poor, serious, pagan man,' I retorted, 'if you take 'em *that* way, you'll wreck your Great Idea.'

'Will you take him to Lord Lundie's to-morrow?' said the Agent-General promptly.

'I suppose I must,' I said, 'if you won't.'

'Not me! I'm going home,' said the Agent-General, and departed. (I am glad that I am no colony's Agent-General.)

Penfentyou continued to argue about naval contributions till 1.15 a.m. though I was victor from the first.

At ten o'clock I got him and his correspondence into the motor, and he had the decency to ask whether he had been unpolished over-night. I

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replied that I waited an apology. This he made excuse for renewed arguments, and used wayside shows as illustrations of the decadence of England.

For example we burst a tyre within a mile of Credence Green, and, to save time, walked into the beautifully-kept little village. His eye was caught by a building of pale-blue tin, stencilled 'Calvinist Chapel,' before whose shuttered windows an Italian organ-grinder with a petticoated monkey was playing 'Dolly Grey.'

'Yes. That's it!' snapped the egoist. 'That's a parable of the general situation in England. And look at those brutes!' A huge household removals van was halted at a public-house. The men in charge were drinking beer from blue and white mugs. It seemed to me a pretty sight, but Penfentenyou said it represented Our National Attitude.

Lord Lundie's summer resting-place we learned was a farm, a little out of the village, up a hill round which curled a high-hedged road. Only an initiated few spend their holidays at Credence Green, and they have trained the householders to keep the place select. Penfentenyou made a grievance of this as we walked up the lane, followed at a distance by the organ-grinder.

'Suppose he is having a house-party,' he said. 'Anything's possible in this insane land.'

THE PUZZLER

Just at that minute we found ourselves opposite an empty villa. Its roof was of black slate, with bright unweathered ridge-tiling; its walls were of blood-coloured brick, cornered and banded with vermiculated stucco work, and there was cobalt, magenta, and purest apple-green window glass on either side of the front door. The whole was fenced from the road by a low, brick-pillared, flint wall, topped with a cast-iron Gothic rail, picked out in blue and gold.

Tight beds of geranium, calceolaria, and lobelia speckled the grass-plat, from whose centre rose one of the finest araucarias (its other name by the way is 'monkey-puzzler') that it has ever been my lot to see. It must have been full thirty feet high, and its foliage exquisitely answered the iron railings. Such *bijou ne plus ultras* replete with all the amenities do not, as I pointed out to Penfentenyou, transpire outside of England.

A hedge, swinging sharp right, flanked the garden, and above it on a slope of daisy-dotted meadows we could see Lord Lundie's tiled and half-timbered summer farmhouse. Of a sudden we heard voices behind the tree—the fine full tones of the unembarrassed English, speaking to their equals—that tore through the hedge like sleet through rafters.

'That it is not called "monkey-puzzler" for

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nothing, I willingly concede'—this was a rich and rolling note—'but on the other hand——'

'I submit, me lud, that the name implies that it might, could, would, or should be ascended by a monkey, and *not* that the ascent is a physical impossibility. I believe one of our South American spider monkeys wouldn't hesitate . . . By Jove, it might be worth trying, if——'

This was a crisper voice than the first. A third, higher-pitched, and full of pleasant affectations, broke in.

'Oh, practical men, there is no ape here. Why do you waste one of God's own days on unprofitable discussion? Give me a match!'

'I've a good mind to make you demonstrate in your own person. Come on, Bubbles! We'll make Jimmy climb!'

There was a sound of scuffling, broken by squeaks from Jimmy of the high voice. I turned back and drew Penfentenyou into the side of the flanking hedge. I remembered to have read in a society paper that Lord Lundie's lesser name was 'Bubbles.'

'What are they doing?' Penfentenyou said sharply. 'Drunk?'

'Just playing! Superabundant vitality of the Race, you know. We'll watch 'em,' I answered. The noise ceased.

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'My deliver,' Jimmy gasped. 'The ram caught in the thicket, and—I'm the only one who can talk Neapolitan! Leggo my collar!' He cried aloud in a foreign tongue, and was answered from the gate.

'It's the Calvinistic organ-grinder,' I whispered. I had already found a practicable break at the bottom of the hedge. 'They're going to try to make the monkey climb, I believe.'

'Here—let me look!' Penfentenyou flung himself down, and rooted till he too broke a peephole. We lay side by side commanding the entire garden at ten yards' range.

'You know 'em?' said Penfentenyou, as I made some noise or other.

'By sight only. The big fellow in flannels is Lord Lundie; the light-built one with the yellow beard painted his picture at the last Academy. He's a swell R.A., James Loman.'

'And the brown chap with the hands?'

'Tomling, Sir Christopher Tomling, the South American engineer who built the——'

'San Juan Viaduct. I know,' said Penfentenyou. 'We ought to have had him with *us*. . . . Do you think a monkey would climb the tree?'

The organ-grinder at the gate fenced his beast with one arm as Jimmy talked.

'Don't show off your futile accomplishments,'

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said Lord Lundie. 'Tell him it's an experiment. Interest him!'

'Shut up, Bubbles. You aren't in court,' Jimmy replied. 'This needs delicacy. Giuseppe says——'

'Interest the monkey,' the brown engineer interrupted. 'He won't climb for love. Cut up to the house and get some biscuits, Bubbles——sugar ones——and an orange or two. No need to tell our womenfolk.'

The huge white figure lobbed off at a trot which would not have disgraced a boy of seventeen. I gathered from something Jimmy let fall that the three had been at Harrow together.

'That Tomling has a head on his shoulders,' muttered Penfentenyou. 'Pity we didn't get him for the Colony. But the question is, will the monkey climb?'

'Be quick, Jimmy. Tell the man we'll give him five bob for the loan of the beast. Now run the organ under the tree, and we'll dress it when Bubbles comes back,' Sir Christopher cried.

'I've often wondered,' said Penfentenyou, 'whether it *would* puzzle a monkey?' He had forgotten the needs of his Growing Nation, and was earnestly parting the white-thorn stems with his fingers.

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THE PUZZLER

Giuseppe and Jimmy did as they were told, the monkey following them with a wary and malignant eye.

'Here's a discovery,' said Jimmy. 'The singing part of this organ comes off the wheels.' He spoke volubly to the proprietor. 'Oh, it's so as Giuseppe can take it to his room o' nights. And play it. D'you hear that? The organ-grinder, after his day's crime, plays his accursed machine for love. For love, Chris! And Michael Angelo was one of 'em!'

'Don't jaw! Tell him to take the beast's petticoat off,' said Sir Christopher Tomling.

Lord Lundie returned, very little winded, through a gap higher up the hedge.

'They're all out, thank goodness!' he cried, 'but I've raided what I could. *Marron glacés*, candied fruit, and a bag of oranges.'

'Excellent!' said the world-renowned contractor. 'Jimmy, you're the light-weight; jump up on the organ and impale these things on the leaves as I hand 'em!'

'I see,' said Jimmy, capering like a spring-buck. 'Upward and onward, eh? First, he'll reach out for—how infernal prickly these leaves are!—this biscuit. Next we'll lure him on—(that's about the reach of his arm)—with the *marron glacé*, and then he'll open out this orange.

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How human! How like your ignoble career, Bubbles!’

With care and elaboration they ornamented that tree’s lower branches with sugar-topped biscuits, oranges, bits of banana, and *marron glacés* till it looked a very ape’s path to Paradise.

‘Unchain the Gyascutis!’ said Sir Christopher commandingly. Giuseppe placed the monkey atop of the organ, where the beast, misunderstanding, stood on his head.

‘He’s throwing himself on the mercy of the Court, me lud,’ said Jimmy. ‘No—now he’s interested. Now he’s reaching after higher things. What wouldn’t I give to have —— here’ (he mentioned a name not unhonoured in British Art). ‘Ambition plucking apples of Sodom!’ (the monkey had pricked himself and was swearing). ‘Genius hampered by Convention! Oh, there’s a whole bushelful of allegories in it!’

‘Give him time. He’s balancing the probabilities,’ said Lord Lundie.

The three closed round the monkey, hanging on his every motion with an earnestness almost equal to ours. The great judge’s head—seamed and vertical forehead, iron mouth, and pike-like under-jaw, all set on that thick neck rising out of the white flannelled collar—was thrown against the puckered green silk of the organ-front as it

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might have been a cameo of Titus. Jimmy, with raised eyes and parted lips, fingered his grizzled chestnut beard, and I was near enough to note the capable beauty of his hands. Sir Christopher stood a little apart, his arms folded behind his back, one heavy brown boot thrust forward, chin in as curbed, and black eyebrows lowered to shade the keen eyes.

Giuseppe's dark face between flashing earrings, a twisted rag of red and yellow silk round his throat, turned from the reaching yearning monkey to the pink and white biscuits spiked on the bronzed leafage. And upon them all fell the serious and workmanlike sun of an English summer forenoon.

'Fils de Saint Louis, montez au ciel!' said Lord Lundie suddenly in a voice that made me think of Black Caps. I do not know what the monkey thought, because at that instant he leaped off the organ and disappeared.

There was a clash of broken glass behind the tree.

The monkey's face, distorted with passion, appeared at an upper window of the house, and a starred hole in the stained-glass window to the left of the front door showed the first steps of his upward path.

'We've got to catch him,' cried Sir Christopher. *'Come along!'*

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They pushed at the door, which was unlocked.

'Yes. But consider the ethics of the case,' said Jimmy. 'Isn't this burglary or something, Bubbles?'

'Settle that when he's caught,' said Sir Christopher. 'We're responsible for the beast.'

A furious clanging of bells broke out of the empty house, followed by muffled gurglings and trumpeting.

'What the deuce is that?' I asked, half aloud.

'The plumbing, of course,' said Penfentenyou. 'What a pity! I believe he'd have climbed if Lord Lundie hadn't put him off!'

'Wait a moment, Chris,' said Jimmy the interpreter. 'Giuseppe says he may answer to the music of his infancy. Giuseppe therefore will go in with the organ. Orpheus with his lute, you know. *Avante*, Orpheus! There's no Neapolitan for bathroom, but I fancy your friend is there.'

'I'm not going into another man's house with a hurdy-gurdy,' said Lord Lundie, recoiling, as Giuseppe unshipped the working mechanism of the organ (it developed a hang-down leg) from its wheels, slipped a strap round his shoulders, and gave the handle a twist.

'Don't be a cad, Bubbles,' was Jimmy's answer. 'You couldn't leave us now if you were on the

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Woolsack. Play, Orpheus! The Cadi accompanies.'

With a whoop, a buzz, and a crash, the organ sprang to life under the hand of Giuseppe, and the procession passed through the grained-to-imitate walnut front door. A moment later we saw the monkey ramping on the roof.

'He'll be all over the township in a minute if we don't head him,' said Penfentyou, leaping to his feet, and crashing into the garden. We headed him with pebbles till he retired through a window to the tuneful reminder that he had left a lot of little things behind him. As we passed the front door it swung open, and showed Jimmy the artist sitting at the bottom of a newly-cleaned staircase. He wagged his hands at us, and when we entered we saw that the man was stricken speechless. His eyes grew red—red like a ferret's—and what little breath he had whistled shrilly. At first we thought it was a fit, and then we saw that it was mirth—the inopportune mirth of the Artistic Temperament.

The house palpitated to an infamous melody punctuated by the stump of the barrel-organ's one leg, as Giuseppe above, moved from room to room after his rebel slave. Now and again a floor shook a little under the combined rushes of

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Lord Lurie and Sir Christopher Telling, who gave many and contradictory orders. But when they could they cursed Jimmy with splendid thoroughness.

"Have you anything to do with the house?" panted Jimmy at last. "Because we're using it just now." He gulped. "And I'm—ah—keeping cave."

"All right," said Penitentiary, and shut the hall door.

"Jimmy, you unspeakable blackguard! Jimmy, you cur! You coward!" (Lord Lurie's voice overbore the flood of melody.) "Come up here! Guseppe's saying something we don't understand."

Jimmy listened and interpreted between his lips.

"He says you'd better play the organ, Bubbles, and let him do the staking. The monkey knows him."

"By Jove, he's quite right," said Sir Christopher from the landing. "Take it, Bubbles, at once."

"My God!" said Lord Lurie in horror.

The chase revivified over our heads, from the attics to the first floor and back again. Bodies and voices met in collision and argument, and once or twice the organ hit walls and doors. Then it broke forth in a new manner.

"He's playing it," said Jimmy. "I know his acute Justinian ear. Are you fond of music?"

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'I think Lord Lurdie plays very well for a beginner,' I ventured.

'Ah! That's the trained legal intellect. Like mastering a brief. I haven't got it.' He wiped his eyes and shook.

'Hi!' said Penfentenyou, looking through the stained-glass window down the garden. 'What's that!'

A household removals van, in charge of four men, had halted at the gate. A husband and his wife—householders beyond question—quarrelled irresolutely up the path. He looked tired. She was certainly cross. In all this haphazard world the last couple to understand a scientific experiment.

I laid hands on Jimmy—the clamour above drowning speech—and with Penfentenyou's aid, propped him like an umbrella against the window, that he should see.

He saw, nodded, fell as an umbrella can fall, and kneeling, beat his forehead on the stout door. Penfentenyou said the word.

The furniture men reinforced the two figures on the path, and advanced, spreading generously.

'Hain't we better warn them up-saurs?' I suggested.

'No. I'll die first!' said Jimmy. 'I'm pretty near it now. Besides, they called me names.'

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I turned from the Artist to the Administrator.

'*Ceteris paribus*, I think we'd better be going,' said Penfentenyou, dealer in crises.

'Ta—take me with you,' said Jimmy. 'I've no reputation to lose, but I'd like to watch 'em from—er—outside the picture.'

'There's always a *modus vivendi*,' Penfentenyou murmured, and tiptoed along the hall to a back door, which he opened quite silently. We passed into a tangle of gooseberry bushes where, at his statesmanlike example, we crawled on all fours, and regained the hedge.

Here we lay up, secure in our alibi.

'But your firm,'—the woman was wailing to the furniture removals men—'your firm *promised* me everything should be in yesterday. And it's to-day! You should have been here yesterday!'

'The last tenants ain't out yet, lydy,' said one of them.

Lord Lundie was rapidly improving in technique, though organ-grinding, unlike the Law, is more of a calling than a trade, and he hung occasionally on a dead centre. Giuseppe, I think, was singing, but I could not understand the drift of Sir Christopher's remarks. They were Spanish.

The woman said something we did not catch.

'You might 'ave sub-let it,' the man insisted. 'Or your gentleman 'ere might.'

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'But I didn't. Send for the Police at once.'

'I wouldn't do that, lydy. They're only fruit-pickers on a beano. They aren't particular where they sleep.'

'D'you mean they've been sleeping *there*? I only had it cleaned last week. Get them out.'

'Oh, if you say so, we'll 'ave 'em out of it in two twos. Alf, fetch me the spare swingle-bar.'

'Don't! You'll knock the paint off the door. Get them out!'

'What the 'ell else am I trying to do for you, lydy?' the man answered with pathos; but the woman wheeled on her mate.

'Edward! They're all drunk here, and they're all mad there. Do something!' she said.

Edward took one short step forward, and sighed 'Hullo!' in the direction of the turbulent house. The woman walked up and down, the very figure of Domestic Tragedy. The furniture men swayed a little on their heels, and——

'Got him!' The shout rang through all the windows at once. It was followed by a blood-hound-like bay from Sir Christopher, a maniacal prestissimo on the organ, and loud cries for Jimmy. But Jimmy, at my side, rolled his congested eyeballs, owl-wise.

'I never knew them,' he said. 'I'm an orphan.'



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The front door opened, and the three came forth to short-lived triumph. I had never before seen a Law Lord dressed as for tennis, with a stump-leg barrel-organ strapped to his shoulder. But it is a shy bird in this plumage. Lord Lundie strove to disembarass himself of his accoutrements much as an ill-trained Punch and Judy dog tries to escape backwards through his frilled collar. Sir Christopher, covered with limewash, cherished a bleeding thumb, and the almost crazy monkey tore at Giuseppe's hair.

The men on both sides reeled, but the woman stood her ground. 'Idiots!' she said, and once more 'Idiots!'

I could have gladdened a few convicts of my acquaintance with a photograph of Lord Lundie at that instant.

'Madam,' he began, wonderfully preserving the roll in his voice, 'it was a monkey.'

Sir Christopher sucked his thumb and nodded.

'Take it away and go,' she replied. 'Go away!'

I would have gone, and gladly, on this permission, but these still strong men must ever be justifying themselves. Lord Lundie turned to the husband, who for the first time spoke.

'I have rented this house. I am moving in,' he said.

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'We ought to have been in yesterday,' the woman interrupted.

'Yes. We ought to have been in yesterday. Have you slept there overnight?' said the man peevishly.

'No, I assure you we haven't,' said Lord Lundie.

'Then go away. Go quite away,' cried the woman.

They went—in single file down the path. They went silently, restrapping the organ on its wheels, and re-chaining the monkey to the organ.

'Damn it all!' said Penfentenyou. 'They *do* face the music, and they do stick by each other—in private life!'

'Ties of Common Funk,' I answered. Giuseppe ran to the gate and fled back to the possible world. Lord Lundie and Sir Christopher, constrained by tradition, paced slowly.

Then it came to pass that the woman, who walked behind them, lifted up her eyes, and beheld the tree which they had dressed.

'Stop!' she called; and they stopped. 'Who did that?'

There was no answer. The Eternal Bad Boy in every man hung its head before the Eternal Mother in every woman.

'Who put these disgusting things there?' she repeated.

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Suddenly Penfentenyou, Premier of his Colony in all but name, left Jimmy and me, and appeared at the gate. (If he is not turned out of office, that is how he will appear on the Day of Armageddon.)

‘Well done you!’ he cried zealously, and doffed his hat to the woman. ‘Have you any children, madam?’ he demanded.

‘Yes, two. They should have been here to-day. The firm promised——’

‘Then we’re not a minute too soon. That monkey—escaped. It was a very dangerous beast. Might have frightened your children into fits. All the organ-grinder’s fault! A most lucky thing these gentlemen caught it when they did. I hope you aren’t badly mauled, Sir Christopher?’ Shaken as I was (I wanted to get away and laugh), I could not but admire the scoundrel’s consummate tact in leading his second highest trump. An ass would have introduced Lord Lundie and they would not have believed him.

It took the trick. The couple smiled, and gave respectful thanks for their deliverance by such hands from such perils.

‘Not in the least,’ said Lord Lundie. ‘Anybody—any father—would have done as much, and—pray don’t apologise—your mistake was quite natural.’ A furniture man sniggered here, and Lord Lundie rolled an Eye of Doom on their

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ranks. 'By the way, if you have trouble with these persons—they seem to have taken as much as is good for them—please let me know. Er—*Good morning!*'

They turned into the lane.

'Heaven's!' said Jimmy, brushing himself down. 'Who's that real man with the real head?' and we hurried after them, for they were running unsteadily, squeaking like rabbits as they ran. We overtook them in a little nut wood half a mile up the road, where they had turned aside, and were rolling. So we rolled with them, and ceased not till we had arrived at the extremity of exhaustion.

'You—you saw it all, then?' said Lord Lundie, rebuttoning his nineteen-inch collar.

'I saw it was a vital question from the first,' responded Penfentenyou, and blew his nose.

'It was. By the way, d'you mind telling me your name?'

Summa. Penfentenyou's Great Idea has gone through, a little chipped at the edges, but in fine and far-reaching shape. His Opposite Number worked at it like a mule—a bewildered mule, beaten from behind, coaxed from in front, and propped on either soft side by Lord Lundie of the compressed mouth and the searing tongue.



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Sir Christopher Tomling has been ravished from the Argentine, where, after all, he was but preparing trade-routes for hostile peoples, and now adorns the forefront of Penfentenyou's Advisory Board. This was an unforeseen extra, as was Jimmy's gratis full-length (it will be in this year's Academy) of Penfentenyou, who has returned to his own place.

Now and again, from afar off, between the slam and bump of his shifting scenery, the glare of his manipulated limelight, and the controlled rolling of his thunder-drums, I catch his voice, lifted in encouragement and advice to his fellow-countrymen. He is quite sound on Ties of Sentiment, and—alone of Colonial Statesmen—ventures to talk of the Ties of Common Funk.

Herein I have my reward.

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The Celt in all his variants from Bult to Ballyhoo,
His mental processes are plain—one knows what he will do,
And can logically predicate his finish by his start :
But the English—ah, the English !—they are quite a race
apart.

Their psychology is bovine, their outlook crude and raw ;
They abandon vital matters to be tickled with a straw ;
But the straw that they were tickled with—the chaff that they
were fed with—
They convert into a weaver's beam to break their foemen's
head with.

For undemocratic reasons and for motives not of State,
They arrive at their conclusions—largely inarticulate.
Being void of self-expression they confide their views to none,
But sometimes, in a smoking-room, one learns why things
were done.

In telegraphic sentences, half swallowed at the ends,
They hint a matter's inwardness—and there the matter ends.
And while the Celt is talking from Valencia to Kirkwall
The English—ah, the English !—don't say anything at all !



LITTLE FOXES

LITTLE FOXES

A Tale of the Gihon Hunt

A FOX came out of his earth on the banks of the great River Gihon, which waters Ethiopia. He saw a white man riding through the dry dhurra-stalks, and, that his destiny might be fulfilled, barked at him.

The rider drew rein among the villagers round his stirrup.

‘What,’ said he, ‘is that?’

‘That,’ said the Sheikh of the village, ‘is a fox,
O Excellency Our Governor.’

‘It is not, then, a jackal?’

‘No jackal, but Abu Hussein the father of cunning.’

‘Also,’ the white man spoke half aloud, ‘I am Mudir of this Province.’

‘It is true,’ they cried. ‘Ya, Saart el Mudir’
(O Excellency Our Governor).

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The Great River Gihon, well used to the moods of kings, slid between his mile-wide banks toward the sea, while the Governor praised God in a loud and searching cry never before heard by the river.

When he had lowered his right forefinger from behind his right ear, the villagers talked to him of their crops—barley, dhurrah, millet, onions, and the like. The Governor stood in his stirrups. North he looked up a strip of green cultivation a few hundred yards wide that lay like a carpet between the river and the tawny line of the desert. Sixty miles that strip stretched before him, and as many behind. At every half-mile a groaning water-wheel lifted the soft water from the river to the crops by way of a mud-built aqueduct. A foot or so wide was the water-channel; five foot or more high was the bank on which it ran, and its base was broad in proportion. Abu Hussein, misnamed the Father of Cunning, drank from the river below his earth, and his shadow was long in the low sun. He could not understand the loud cry which the Governor had cried.

The Sheikh of the village spoke of the crops from which the rulers of all lands draw revenue; but the Governor's eyes were fixed, between his horse's ears, on the nearest water-channel.

‘Very like a ditch in Ireland,’ he murmured,

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and smiled, dreaming of a razor-topped bank in distant Kildare.

Encouraged by that smile, the Sheikh continued. 'When crops fail it is necessary to remit taxation. Then it is a good thing, O Excellency Our Governor, that you come and see the crops which have failed, and discover that we have not lied.'

'Assuredly.' The Governor shortened his reins. The horse cantered on, rose at the embankment of the water-channel, changed leg cleverly on top, and hopped down in a cloud of golden dust.

Abu Hussein from his earth watched with interest. He had never before seen such things.

'Assuredly,' the Governor repeated, and came back by the way he had gone. 'It is always best to see for one's self.'

An ancient and still bullet-speckled stern-wheel steamer, with a barge lashed to her side, came round the river bend. She whistled to tell the Governor his dinner was ready, and the horse, seeing his fodder piled on the barge, whinnied back.

'Moreover,' the Sheikh added, 'in the days of the Oppression the Emirs and their creatures dispossessed many people of their lands. All up and down the river our people are waiting to return to their lawful fields.'



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‘Judges have been appointed to settle that matter,’ said the Governor. ‘They will presently come in steamers and hear the witnesses.’

‘Wherefore? Did the Judges kill the Emirs? We would rather be judged by the men who executed God’s judgment on the Emirs. We would rather abide by *your* decision, O Excellency Our Governor.’

The Governor nodded. It was a year since he had seen the Emirs stretched close and still round the reddened sheepskin where lay El Mahdi, the Prophet of God. Now there remained no trace of their dominion except the old steamer, once part of a Dervish flotilla, which was his house and office. She sidled into the shore, lowered a plank, and the Governor followed his horse aboard.

Lights burned on her till late, dully reflected in the river that tugged at her mooring-ropes. The Governor read, not for the first time, the administration reports of one John Jorrocks, M.F.H.

‘We shall need,’ he said suddenly to his Inspector, ‘about ten couple. I’ll get ’em when I go home. You’ll be Whip, Baker?’

The Inspector, who was not yet twenty-five, signified his assent in the usual manner, while Abu Hussein barked at the vast desert moon.

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‘Ha!’ said the Governor, coming out in his pyjamas, ‘we’ll be giving you capivi in another three months, my friend.’

It was four, as a matter of fact, ere a steamer with a melodious bargeful of hounds anchored at that landing. The Inspector leaped down among them, and the homesick wanderers received him as a brother.

‘Everybody fed ’em everything on board ship, but they’re real dainty hounds at bottom,’ the Governor explained. ‘That’s Royal you’ve got hold of—the pick of the bunch—and the bitch that’s got hold of you—she’s a little excited—is May Queen. Merriman, out of Cottesmore Maudlin, you know.’

‘I know. Grand old betch with the tan eye-brows,’ the Inspector cooed. ‘Oh, Ben! I shall take an interest in life now. Hark to ’em! O hark!’

Abu Hussein, under the high bank, went about his night’s work. An eddy carried his scent to the barge, and three villages heard the crash of music that followed. Even then Abu Hussein did not know better than to bark in reply.

‘Well, what about my Province?’ the Governor asked.

‘Not so bad,’ the Inspector answered, with

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Royal's head between his knees. 'Of course, all the villages want remission of taxes, but, as far as I can see, the whole country's stinkin' with foxes. Our trouble will be choppin' 'em in cover. I've got a list of the only villages entitled to any remission. What d'you call this flat-sided, blue-mottled beast with the jowl?'

'Beagle-boy. I have my doubts about him. Do you think we can get two days a week?'

'Easy; and as many byes as you please. The Sheikh of this village here tells me that his barley has failed, and he wants a fifty per cent remission.'

'We'll begin with him to-morrow, and look at his crops as we go. Nothing like personal supervision,' said the Governor.

They began at sunrise. The pack flew off the barge in every direction, and, after gambols, dug like terriers at Abu Hussein's many earths. Then they drank themselves pot-bellied on Gihon water while the Governor and the Inspector chastised them with whips. Scorpions were added; for May Queen nosed one, and was removed to the barge lamenting. Mystery (a puppy, alas!) met a snake, and the blue-mottled Beagle-boy (never a dainty hound) ate that which he should have passed by. Only Royal, of the Belvoir tan head and the sad, discerning eyes, made any attempt to

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uphold the honour of England before the watching village.

'You can't expect everything,' said the Governor after breakfast.

'We got it, though—everything except foxes. Have you seen May Queen's nose?' said the Inspector.

'And Mystery's dead. We'll keep 'em coupled next time till we get well in among the crops. I say, what a babbling body-snatcher that Beagle-boy is! Ought to be drowned!'

'They bury people so dam casual hereabouts. Give him another chance,' the Inspector pleaded, not knowing that he should live to repent most bitterly.

'Talkin' of chances,' said the Governor, 'this Sheikh lies about his barley bein' a failure. If it's high enough to hide a hound at this time of year, it's all right. And he wants a fifty per cent remission, you said?'

'You didn't go on past the melon patch where I tried to turn Wanderer. It's all burned up from there on to the desert. His other water-wheel has broken down, too,' the Inspector replied.

'Very good. We'll split the difference and allow him twenty-five per cent off. Where'll we meet to-morrow?'

'There's some trouble among the villages down

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the river about their land-titles. It's good goin' ground there, too,' the Inspector said.

The next meet, then, was some twenty miles down the river, and the pack were not enlarged till they were fairly among the fields. Abu Hussein was there in force—four of him. Four delirious hunts of four minutes each—four hounds per fox—ended in four earths just above the river. All the village looked on.

'We forgot about the earths. The banks are riddled with 'em. This'll defeat us,' said the Inspector.

'Wait a moment!' The Governor drew forth a sneezing hound. 'I've just remembered I'm Governor of these parts.'

'Then turn out a black battalion to stop for us. We'll need 'em, old man.'

The Governor straightened his back. 'Give ear, O people!' he cried. 'I make a new Law!'

The villagers closed in. He called:—

'Henceforward I will give one dollar to the man on whose land Abu Hussein is found. And another dollar'—he held up the coin—'to the man on whose land these dogs shall kill him. But to the man on whose land Abu Hussein shall run into a hole such as is this hole, I will give not dollars, but a most unmeasurable beating. Is it understood?'

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'Our Excellency,' a man stepped forth, 'on my land Abu Hussein was found this morning. Is it not so, brothers?'

None denied. The Governor tossed him over four dollars without a word.

'On my land they all went into their holes,' cried another. 'Therefore I must be beaten.'

'Not so. The land is mine, and mine are the beatings.'

This second speaker thrust forward his shoulders already bared, and the villagers shouted.

'Hullo! Two men anxious to be licked? There must be some swindle about the land,' said the Governor. Then in the local vernacular: 'What are your rights to the beating?'

As a river-reach changes beneath a slant of the sun, that which had been a scattered mob changed to a court of most ancient justice. The hounds tore and sobbed at Abu Hussein's hearthstone, all unnoticed among the legs of the witnesses, and Gihon, also accustomed to laws, purred approval.

'You will not wait till the Judges come up the river to settle the dispute?' said the Governor at last.

'No!' shouted all the village save the man who had first asked to be beaten. 'We will abide by Our Excellency's decision. Let Our Excellency

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turn out the creatures of the Emirs who stole our land in the days of the Oppression.'

'And thou sayest?' the Governor turned to the man who had first asked to be beaten.

'I say *I* will wait till the wise Judges come down in the steamer. Then I will bring my many witnesses,' he replied.

'He is rich. He will bring many witnesses,' the village Sheikh muttered.

'No need. Thy own mouth condemns thee!' the Governor cried. 'No man lawfully entitled to his land would wait one hour before entering upon it. Stand aside!' The man fell back, and the village jeered him.

The second claimant stooped quickly beneath the lifted hunting-crop. The village rejoiced.

'Oh, Such an one; Son of such an one,' said the Governor, prompted by the Sheikh, 'learn, from the day when I send the order, to block up all the holes where Abu Hussein may hide—on—thy—land!'

The light flicks ended. The man stood up triumphant. By that accolade had the Supreme Government acknowledged his title before all men.

While the village praised the perspicacity of the Governor, a naked, pock-marked child strode forward to the earth, and stood on one leg, unconcerned as a young stork.

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'Ha!' he said, hands behind his back. 'This should be blocked up with bundles of dhurra-stalks—or, better, bundles of thorns.'

'Better thorns,' said the Governor. 'Thick ends innermost.'

The child nodded gravely and squatted on the sand.

'An evil day for thee, Abu Hussein,' he shrilled into the mouth of the earth. 'A day of obstacles to thy flagitious returns in the morning.'

'Who is it?' the Governor asked the Sheikh. 'It thinks.'

'Frag the Fatherless. His people were slain in the days of the Oppression. The man to whom Our Excellency has awarded the land is, as it were, his maternal uncle.'

'Will it come with me and feed the big dogs?' said the Governor.

The other peering children drew back. 'Run!' they cried. 'Our Excellency will feed Frag to the big dogs.'

'I will come,' said Frag. 'And I will never go.' He threw his arm round Royal's neck, and the wise beast licked his face.

'Benjamin, by Jove!' the Inspector cried.

'No!' said the Governor. 'I believe he has the makings of a James Pigg!'

Frag waved his hand to his uncle, and led

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Royal on to the barge. The rest of the pack followed.

Gihon, that had seen many sports, learned to know the hunt barge well. He met her rounding his bends on grey December dawns to music wild and lamentable as the almost forgotten throb of Dervish drums, when, high above Royal's tenor bell, sharper even than lying Beagle-boy's falsetto break, Farag chanted deathless war against Abu Hussein and all his seed. At sunrise the river would shoulder her carefully into her place, and listen to the rush and scutter of the pack fleeing up the gang-plank, and the tramp of the Governor's Arab behind them. They would pass over the brow into the dewless crops where Gihon, low and shrunken, could only guess what they were about when Abu Hussein flew down the bank to scratch at a stopped earth, and flew back into the barley again. As Farag had foretold, it was evil days for Abu Hussein ere he learned to take the necessary steps and to get away crisply. Sometimes Gihon saw the whole procession of the hunt silhouetted against the morning-blue, bearing him company for many merry miles. At every half mile the horses and the donkeys jumped the water-channels—up, on, change your leg, and off again—like figures in a zoetrope, till they grew

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small along the line of waterwheels. Then Gihon waited their rustling return through the crops, and took them to rest on his bosom at ten o'clock. While the horses ate, and Farag slept with his head on Royal's flank, the Governor and his Inspector worked for the good of the Hunt and his Province.

After a little time there was no need to beat any man for neglecting his earths. The steamer's destination was telegraphed from waterwheel to waterwheel, and the villagers stopped out and put to according. If an earth were overlooked, it meant some dispute as to the ownership of the land, and then and there the Hunt checked and settled it in this wise: The Governor and the Inspector side by side, but the latter half a horse's length to the rear; both bare-shouldered claimants well in front; the villagers half mooned behind them, and Farag with the pack, who quite understood the performance, sitting down on the left. Twenty minutes were enough to settle the most complicated case, for, as the Governor said to a judge on the steamer, 'One gets at the truth in a hunting-field a heap quicker than in your law-courts.'

'But when the evidence is conflicting?' the Judge suggested.

'Watch the field. They'll throw tongue fast

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enough if you're running a wrong scent. You've never had an appeal from one of my decisions yet.'

The Sheikhs on horseback—the lesser folk on clever donkeys—the children so despised by Farag—soon understood that villages which repaired their waterwheels and channels stood highest in the Governor's favour. He bought their barley for his horses.

'Channels,' he said, 'are necessary that we may all jump them. They are necessary, moreover, for the crops. Let there be many wheels and sound channels—and much good barley.'

'Without money,' replied an aged Sheikh, 'there are no waterwheels.'

'I will lend the money,' said the Governor.

'At what interest, O Our Excellency?'

'Take you two of May Queen's puppies to bring up in your village in such a manner that they do not eat filth, nor lose their hair, nor catch fever from lying in the sun, but become wise hounds.'

'Like Ray-yal—not like Bigglebai?' (already it was an insult along the River to compare a man to the shifty anthropophagous blue-mottled harrier).

'Certainly, like Ray-yal—not in the least like Bigglebai. *That* shall be the interest on the loan.

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Let the puppies thrive and the waterwheel be built, and I shall be content,' said the Governor.

'The wheel shall be built, but, O Our Excellency, if by God's favour the pups grow to be well-smellers, not filth-eaters, not unaccustomed to their names, not lawless, who will do them and me justice at the time of judging the young dogs?'

'Hounds, man, hounds! Ha-wands, O Sheikh, we call them in their manhood.'

'The ha-wands when they are judged at the Sha-ho. I have unfriends down the river to whom Our Excellency has also entrusted ha-wands to bring up.'

'Puppies, man! Pah-peaz, we call them, O Sheikh, in their childhood.'

'Pah-peaz. My enemies may judge my pah-peaz unjustly at the Sha-ho. This must be thought of.'

'I see the obstacle. Hear now! If the new waterwheel is built in a month without oppression, thou, O Sheikh, shalt be named one of the judges to judge the pah-peaz at the Sha-ho. Is it understood?'

'Understood. We will build the wheel. I and my seed are responsible for the repayment of the loan. Where are my pah-peaz? If they eat fowls, must they on any account eat the feathers?'

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‘On no account must they eat the feathers. Farag in the barge will tell thee how they are to live.’

There is no instance of any default on the Governor’s personal and unauthorised loans, for which they called him the Father of Waterwheels. But the first puppy-show at the capital needed enormous tact and the presence of a black battalion ostentatiously drilling in the barrack square to prevent trouble after the prize-giving.

But who can chronicle the glories of the Gihon Hunt—or their shames? Who remembers the kill in the market-place, when the Governor bade the assembled sheikhs and warriors observe how the hounds would instantly devour the body of Abu Hussein; but how, when he had scientifically broken it up, the weary pack turned from it in loathing, and Farag wept because he said the world’s face had been blackened? What men who have not yet ridden beyond the sound of any horn recall the midnight run which ended—Beagle-boy leading—among tombs; the hasty whip-off, and the oath, taken above bones, to forget the worry? The desert run, when Abu Hussein forsook the cultivation, and made a six-mile point to earth in a desolate khor—when strange armed riders on camels swooped out of a ravine, and instead of giving battle, offered to take the tired

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hounds home on their beasts. Which they did, and vanished.

Above all, who remembers the death of Royal, when a certain Sheikh wept above the body of the stainless hound as it might have been his son's—and that day the Hunt rode no more? The badly-kept log-book says little of this, but at the end of their second season (forty-nine brace) appears the dark entry: 'New blood badly wanted. They are beginning to listen to Beagle-boy.'

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The Inspector attended to the matter when his leave fell due.

'Remember,' said the Governor, 'you must get us the best blood in England—real, dainty hounds—expense no object, but don't trust your own judgment. Present my letters of introduction, and take what they give you.'

The Inspector presented his letters in a society where they make much of horses, more of hounds, and are tolerably civil to men who can ride. They passed him from house to house, mounted him according to his merits, and fed him, after five years of goat chop and Worcester sauce, perhaps a thought too richly.

The seat or castle where he made his great coup does not much matter. Four Masters of Foxhounds were at table, and in a mellow hour

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the Inspector told them stories of the Gihon Hunt. He ended: 'Ben said I wasn't to trust my own judgment about hounds, but *I* think there ought to be a special tariff for Empire-makers.'

As soon as his hosts could speak, they reassured him on this point.

'And now tell us about your first puppy-show all over again,' said one.

'And about the earth-stoppin'. Was that all Ben's own invention?' said another.

'Wait a moment,' said a large, clean-shaven man—not an M.F.H.—at the end of the table. 'Are your villagers habitually beaten by your Governor when they fail to stop foxes' holes?'

The tone and the phrase were enough even if, as the Inspector confessed afterwards, the big, blue double-chinned man had not looked so like Beagle-boy. He took him on for the honour of Ethiopia.

'We only hunt twice a week—sometimes three times. I've never known a man chastised more than four times a week—unless there's a bye.'

The large loose-lipped man flung his napkin down, came round the table, cast himself into the chair next the Inspector, and leaned forward earnestly, so that he breathed in the Inspector's face.

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'Chastised with what?' he said.

'With the *kourbash*—on the feet. A *kourbash* is a strip of old hippo-hide with a sort of keel on it, like the cutting edge of a boar's tusk. But we use the rounded side for a first offender.'

'And do any consequences follow this sort of thing? For the victim, I mean—not for you?'

'Ve-ry rarely. Let me be fair. I've never seen a man die under the lash, but gangrene may set up if the *kourbash* has been pickled.'

'Pickled in what?' All the table was still and interested.

'In copperas, of course. Didn't you know *that*?' said the Inspector.

'Thank God I didn't.' The large man sputtered visibly.

'The Inspector wiped his face and grew bolder.

'You mustn't think we're careless about our earth-stoppers. We've a Hunt fund for hot tar. Tar's a splendid dressing if the toe-nails aren't beaten off. But huntin' as large a country as we do, we mayn't be back at that village for a month, and if the dressings ain't renewed, and gangrene sets in, often as not you find your man pegging about on his stumps. We've a well-known local name for 'em down the river. We call 'em the Mudir's Cranes. You see, I persuaded the Governor only to bastinado on one foot.'



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‘On one foot? The Mudir’s Cranes!’ The large man turned purple to the top of his bald head. ‘Would you mind giving me the local word for Mudir’s Cranes?’

From a too well stocked memory the Inspector drew one short adhesive word which surprises by itself even unblushing Ethiopia. He spelt it out, saw the large man write it down on his cuff and withdraw. Then the Inspector translated a few of its significations and implications to the four Masters of Foxhounds. He left three days later with eight couple of the best hounds in England—a free and a friendly and an ample gift from four packs to the Gihon Hunt. He had honestly meant to undeceive the large blue-mottled man, but somehow forgot about it.

The new draft marks a new chapter in the Hunt’s history. From an isolated phenomenon in a barge it became a permanent institution with brick-built kennels ashore, and an influence social, political, and administrative, co-terminous with the boundaries of the province. Ben, the Governor, departed to England, where he kept a pack of real dainty hounds, but never ceased to long for the old lawless lot. His successors were *ex-officio* Masters of the Gihon Hunt, as all Inspectors were Whips. For one reason, Farag, the kennel huntsman, in khaki and puttees, would obey

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nothing under the rank of an Excellency, and the hounds would obey no one but Farag; for another, the best way of estimating crop returns and revenue was by riding straight to hounds; for a third, though Judges down the river issued signed and sealed land-titles to all lawful owners, yet public opinion along the river never held any such title valid till it had been confirmed, according to precedent, by the Governor's hunting crop in the hunting field, above the wilfully neglected earth. True, the ceremony had been cut down to three mere taps on the shoulder, but Governors who tried to evade that much found themselves and their office compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses who took up their time with lawsuits and, worse still, neglected the puppies. The older sheikhs, indeed, stood out for the unmeasurable beatings of the old days—the sharper the punishment, they argued, the surer the title; but here the hand of modern progress was against them, and they contented themselves with telling tales of Ben the first Governor, whom they called the Father of Waterwheels, and of that heroic age when men, horses, and hounds were worth following.

This same Modern Progress which brought dog-biscuit and brass water-taps to the kennels was at work all over the world. Forces, Activi-

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ties, and Movements sprang into being, agitated themselves, coalesced, and, in one political avalanche, overwhelmed a bewildered, and not in the least intending it, England. The echoes of the New Era were borne into the Province on the wings of inexplicable cables. The Gihon Hunt read speeches and sentiments, and policies which amazed them, and they thanked God, prematurely, that their Province was too far off, too hot, and too hard worked to be reached by those speakers or their policies. But they, with others, under-estimated the scope and purpose of the New Era.

One by one, the Provinces of the Empire were hauled up and baited, hit and held, lashed under the belly, and forced back on their haunches for the amusement of their new masters in the parish of Westminster. One by one they fell away, sore and angry, to compare stripes with each other at the ends of the uneasy earth. Even so the Gihon Hunt, like Abu Hussein in the old days, did not understand. Then it reached them through the Press that they habitually flogged to death good revenue-paying cultivators who neglected to stop earths; but that the few, the very few, who did not die under hippo-hide whips soaked in copperas, walked about on their gangrenous ankle-bones, and were known in derision as the Mudir's Cranes. The charges were vouched for in the House of

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Commons by a Mr. Lethabie Groombride, who had formed a Committee, and was disseminating literature. The Province groaned; the Inspector—now an Inspector of Inspectors—whistled. He had forgotten the gentleman who sputtered in people's faces.

'He shouldn't have looked so like Beagle-boy!' was his sole defence when he met the Governor at breakfast on the steamer after a meet.

'You shouldn't have joked with an animal of that class,' said Peter the Governor. 'Look what Farag has brought me!'

It was a pamphlet, signed on behalf of a Committee by a lady secretary, but composed by some person who thoroughly understood the language of the Province. After telling the tale of the beatings, it recommended all the beaten to institute criminal proceedings against their Governor, and, as soon as might be, to rise against English oppression and tyranny. Such documents were new in Ethiopia in those days.

The Inspector read the last half page. 'But—but,' he stammered, 'this is impossible. White men don't write this sort of stuff.'

'Don't they, just?' said the Governor. 'They get made Cabinet Ministers for doing it too. I went home last year. I know.'

'It'll blow over,' said the Inspector weakly.

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‘Not it. Groombride is coming down here to investigate the matter in a few days.’

‘For himself?’

‘The Imperial Government’s behind him. Perhaps you’d like to look at my orders.’ The Governor laid down an uncoded cable. The whip-lash to it ran: ‘You will afford Mr. Groombride every facility for his inquiry, and will be held responsible that no obstacles are put in his way to the fullest possible examination of any witnesses which he may consider necessary. He will be accompanied by his own interpreter, who must not be tampered with.’

‘That’s to me—Governor of the Province!’ said Peter the Governor.

‘It seems about enough,’ the Inspector answered.

Farag, kennel-huntsman, entered the saloon, as was his privilege.

‘My uncle, who was beaten by the Father of Waterwheels, would approach, O Excellency,’ he said, ‘and there are others on the bank.’

‘Admit,’ said the Governor.

There tramped aboard sheikhs and villagers to the number of seventeen. In each man’s hand was a copy of the pamphlet; in each man’s eye terror and uneasiness of the sort that Governors spend and are spent to clear away. Farag’s uncle, now Sheikh of the village, spoke: ‘It is written in

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this book, O Excellency, that the beatings whereby we hold our lands are all valueless. It is written that every man who received such a beating from the Father of Waterwheels who slew the Emirs, should instantly begin a lawsuit, because the title to his land is not valid.'

'It is so written. We do not wish lawsuits. We wish to hold the land as it was given to us after the days of the Oppression,' they cried.

The Governor glanced at the Inspector. This was serious. To cast doubt on the ownership of land means, in Ethiopia, the letting in of waters, and the getting out of troops.

'Your titles are good,' said the Governor. The Inspector confirmed with a nod.

'Then what is the meaning of these writings which come from down the river where the Judges are?' Farag's uncle waved his copy. 'By whose order are we ordered to slay you, O Excellency Our Governor?'

'It is not written that you are to slay me.'

'Not in those very words, but if we leave an earth unstopped, it is the same as though we wished to save Abu Hussein from the hounds. These writings say: "Abolish your rulers." How can we abolish except we kill? We hear rumours of one who comes from down the river soon to lead us to kill.'

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‘Fools!’ said the Governor. ‘Your titles are good. This is madness!’

‘It is so written,’ they answered like a pack.

‘Listen,’ said the Inspector smoothly. ‘I know who caused the writings to be written and sent. He is a man of a blue-mottled jowl, in aspect like Bigglebai who ate unclean matters. He will come up the river and will give tongue about the beatings.’

‘Will he impeach our land-titles? An evil day for him!’

‘Go slow, Baker,’ the Governor whispered. ‘They’ll kill him if they get scared about their land.’

‘I tell a parable.’ The Inspector lit a cigarette. ‘Declare which of you took to walk the children of Milkmaid?’

‘Melik-meid First or Second?’ said Farag quickly.

‘The second—the one which was lamed by the thorn.’

‘No—no. Melik-meid the Second strained her shoulder leaping my water-channel,’ a Sheikh cried. ‘Melik-meid the First was lamed by the thorns on the day when Our Excellency fell thrice.’

‘True—true. The second Melik-meid’s mate was Malvolio, the pied hound,’ said the Inspector.

‘I had two of the second Melik-meid’s pups,’

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said Farag's uncle. 'They died of the madness in their ninth month.'

'And how did they do before they died?' said the Inspector.

'They ran about in the sun and slavered at the mouth till they died.'

'Wherefore?'

'God knows. He sent the madness. It was no fault of mine.'

'Thy own mouth hath answered thee.' The Inspector laughed. 'It is with men as it is with dogs. God afflicts some with a madness. It is no fault of ours if such men run about in the sun and froth at the mouth. The man who is coming will emit spray from his mouth in speaking, and will always edge and push in towards his hearers. When ye see and hear him ye will understand that he is afflicted of God: being mad. He is in God's hands.'

'But our titles—are our titles to our lands good?' the crowd repeated.

'Your titles are in my hands—they are good,' said the Governor.

'And he who wrote the writings is an afflicted of God?' said Farag's uncle.

'The Inspector hath said it,' cried the Governor. 'Ye will see when the man comes. O sheikhs and men, have we ridden together and walked puppies

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together, and bought and sold barley for the horses—that after these years we should run riot on the scent of a madman—an afflicted of God?’

‘But the Hunt pays us to kill mad jackals,’ said Farag’s uncle. ‘And he who questions my titles to my land——’

‘Aahh! ‘Ware riot!’ The Governor’s hunting-crop cracked like a three-pounder. ‘By Allah,’ he thundered, ‘if the afflicted of God come to any harm at your hands, I myself will shoot every hound and every puppy, and the hunt shall ride no more. On your heads be it. Go in peace, and tell the others.’

‘The Hunt shall ride no more,’ said Farag’s uncle. ‘Then how can the land be governed? No—no, O Excellency Our Governor, we will not harm a hair on the head of the afflicted of God. He shall be to us as is Abu Hussein’s wife in the breeding season.’

When they were gone the Governor mopped his forehead.

‘We must put a few soldiers in every village this Groombride visits, Baker. Tell ‘em to keep out of sight, and have an eye on the villagers. He’s trying ‘em rather high.’

‘O Excellency,’ said the smooth voice of Farag, laying the *Field* and *Country Life* square on the

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table, 'is the afflicted of God who resembles Bigglebai one with the man whom the Inspector met in the great house in England, and to whom he told the tale of the Mudir's Cranes?'

'The same man, Farag,' said the Inspector.

'I have often heard the Inspector tell the tale to Our Excellency at feeding-time in the kennels; but since I am in the Government service I have never told it to my people. May I loose that tale among the villages?'

The Governor nodded. 'No harm,' said he.

The details of Mr. Groombride's arrival, with his interpreter, who he proposed should eat with him at the Governor's table, his allocution to the Governor on the New Movement, and the sins of Imperialism, I purposely omit. At three in the afternoon Mr. Groombride said: 'I will go out now and address your victims in this village.'

'Won't you find it rather hot?' said the Governor. 'They generally take a nap till sunset at this time of year.'

Mr. Groombride's large, loose lips set. '*That,*' he replied pointedly, 'would be enough to decide me. I fear you have not quite mastered your instructions. May I ask you to send for my interpreter? I hope he has not been tampered with by your subordinates.'

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He was a yellowish boy called Abdul, who had well eaten and drunk with Farag. The Inspector, by the way, was not present at the meal.

‘At whatever risk, I shall go unattended,’ said Mr. Groombride. ‘Your presence would cow them from giving evidence. Abdul, my good friend, would you very kindly open the umbrella?’

He passed up the gang-plank to the village, and with no more prelude than a Salvation Army picket in a Portsmouth slum, cried: ‘Oh, my brothers!’

He did not guess how his path had been prepared. The village was widely awake. Farag, in loose, flowing garments, quite unlike a kennel huntsman’s khaki and puttees, leaned against the wall of his uncle’s house. ‘Come and see the afflicted of God,’ he cried musically, ‘whose face, indeed, resembles that of Bigglebai.’

The village came, and decided that on the whole Farag was right.

‘I can’t quite catch what they are saying,’ said Mr. Groombride.

‘They saying they very much pleased to see you, sar,’ Abdul interpreted.

‘Then I do think they might have sent a deputation to the steamer; but I suppose they were frightened of the officials. Tell them not to be frightened, Abdul.’

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‘He says you are not to be frightened,’ Abdul explained. A child here sputtered with laughter. ‘Refrain from mirth,’ Farag cried. ‘The afflicted of God is the guest of The Excellency Our Governor. We are responsible for every hair of his head.’

‘He has none,’ a voice spoke. ‘He has the white and the shining mange.’

‘Now tell them what I have come for, Abdul, and please keep the umbrella well up. I think I shall reserve myself for my little venacular speech at the end.’

‘Approach! Look! Listen!’ Abdul chanted. ‘The afflicted of God will now make sport. Presently he will speak in your tongue, and will consume you with mirth. I have been his servant for three weeks. I will tell you about his undergarments and his perfumes for his head.’

He told them at length.

‘And didst thou take any of his perfume bottles?’ said Farag at the end.

‘I am his servant. I took two,’ Abdul replied.

‘Ask him,’ said Farag’s uncle, ‘what he knows about our land-titles. Ye young men are all alike.’ He waved a pamphlet. Mr. Groombride smiled to see how the seed sown in London had borne fruit by Gihon. Lo! All the seniors held copies of the pamphlet.

‘He knows less than a buffalo. He told me

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on the steamer that he was driven out of his own land by Demah-Kerazi, which is a devil inhabiting crowds and assemblies,' said Abdul.

'Allah between us and evil!' a woman cackled from the darkness of a hut. 'Come in, children, he may have the Evil Eye.'

'No, my aunt,' said Farag. 'No afflicted of God has an evil eye. Wait till ye hear his mirth-provoking speech which he will deliver. I have heard it twice from Abdul.'

'They seem very quick to grasp the point. How far have you got, Abdul?'

'All about the beatings, sar. They are highly interested.'

'Don't forget about the local self-government, and please hold the umbrella over me. It is hopeless to destroy unless one first builds up.'

'He may not have the Evil Eye,' Farag's uncle grunted, 'but his devil led him too certainly to question my land-title. Ask him whether he still doubts my land-title?'

'Or mine, or mine?' cried the elders.

'What odds? He is an afflicted of God,' Farag called. 'Remember the tale I told you.'

'Yes, but he is an Englishman, and doubtless of influence, or Our Excellency would not entertain him. Bid the down-country jackass ask him.'

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‘Sar,’ said Abdul, ‘these people, much fearing they may be turned out of their land in consequence of your remarks. Therefore they ask you to make promise no bad consequences following your visit.’

Mr. Groombride held his breath and turned purple. Then he stamped his foot.

‘Tell them,’ he cried, ‘that if a hair of any one of their heads is touched by any official on any account whatever, all England shall ring with it. Good God! What callous oppression! The dark places of the earth are full of cruelty.’ He wiped his face, and throwing out his arms cried: ‘Tell them, oh! tell the poor serfs not to be afraid of me. Tell them I come to redress their wrongs—not, heaven knows, to add to their burden.’

The long-drawn gurgle of the practised public speaker pleased them much.

‘That is how the new water-tap runs out in the kennel,’ said Farag. ‘The Excellency Our Governor entertains him that he may make sport. Make him say the mirth-moving speech.’

‘What did he say about my land-titles?’ Farag’s uncle was not to be turned.

‘He says,’ Farag interpreted, ‘that he desires nothing better than that you should live on your lands in peace. He talks as though he believed himself to be Governor.’

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‘Well. We here are all witnesses to what he has said. Now go forward with the sport.’ Farag’s uncle smoothed his garments. ‘How diversely hath Allah made His creatures! On one He bestows strength to slay Emirs; another He causes to go mad and wander in the sun, like the afflicted sons of Melik-meid.’

‘Yes, and to emit spray from the mouth, as the Inspector told us. All will happen as the Inspector foretold,’ said Farag. ‘I have never yet seen the Inspector thrown out during any run.’

‘I think,’ Abdul plucked at Mr. Groombride’s sleeves, ‘I think perhaps it is better now, sar, if you give your fine little native speech. They not understanding English, but much pleased at your condescensions.’

‘Condescensions?’ Mr. Groombride spun round. ‘If they only knew how I felt towards them in my heart! If I could express a tithe of my feelings! I must stay here and learn the language. Hold up the umbrella, Abdul! I think my little speech will show them I know something of their *vie intime*.’

It was a short, simple, carefully-learned address, and the accent, supervised by Abdul on the steamer, allowed the hearers to guess its meaning, which was a request to see one of the Mudir’s Cranes; since the desire of the speaker’s life, the object to

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which he would consecrate his days, was to improve the condition of the Mudir's Cranes. But first he must behold them with his own eyes. Would, then, his brethren, whom he loved, show him a Mudir's Crane whom he desired to love?

Once, twice, and again in his peroration he repeated his demand, using always—that they might see he was acquainted with their local argot—using always, I say, the word which the Inspector had given him in England long ago—the short adhesive word which, by itself, surprises even unblushing Ethiopia.

There are limits to the sublime politeness of an ancient people. A bulky, blue-chinned man in white clothes, his name red-lettered across his lower shirt-front, spluttering from under a green-lined umbrella almost tearful appeals to be introduced to the Unintroducible; naming loudly the Unnameable; dancing, as it seemed, in perverse joy at mere mention of the Unmentionable—found those limits. There was a moment's hush, and then such mirth as Gihon through his centuries had never heard—a roar like to the roar of his own cataracts in flood. Children cast themselves on the ground, and rolled back and forth cheering and whooping; strong men, their faces hidden in their clothes, swayed in silence, till the agony became insupportable, and they threw up their heads and

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bayed at the sun; women, mothers and virgins, shrilled shriek upon mounting shriek, and slapped their thighs as it might have been the roll of musketry. When they tried to draw breath, some half-strangled voice would quack out the word, and the riot began afresh. Last to fall was the city-trained Abdul. He held on to the edge of apoplexy, then collapsed, throwing the umbrella from him.

Mr. Groombride should not be judged too harshly. Exercise and strong emotion under a hot sun, the shock of public ingratitude, for the moment ruffled his spirit. He furled the umbrella, and with it beat the prostrate Abdul, crying that he had been betrayed.

In which posture the Inspector, on horseback, followed by the Governor, suddenly found him.

‘That’s all very well,’ said the Inspector, when he had taken Abdul’s dramatically dying depositions on the steamer, ‘but you can’t hammer a native merely because he laughs at you. I see nothing for it but the law to take its course.’

‘You might reduce the charge to—er—tampering with an interpreter,’ said the Governor. Mr. Groombride was too far gone to be comforted.

‘It’s the publicity that I fear,’ he wailed. ‘Is

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there no possible means of hushing up the affair? You don't know what a question—a single question in the House means to a man of my position—the ruin of my political career, I assure you.'

'I shouldn't have imagined it,' said the Governor thoughtfully.

'And, though perhaps I ought not to say it, I am not without honour in my own country—or influence. A word in season, as you know, Your Excellency. It might carry an official far.'

The Governor shuddered.

'Yes, that had to come too,' he said to himself. 'Well, look here. If I tell this man of yours to withdraw the charge against you, you can go to Gehenna for aught I care. The only condition I make is, that if you write—I suppose that's part of your business—about your travels, you don't praise *me*!'

So far Mr. Groombride has loyally adhered to this understanding.

GALLIO'S SONG

All day long to the judgment-seat
The crazed Provincials drew—
All day long at their ruler's feet
Howled for the blood of the Jew.
Insurrection with one accord
Banded itself and woke :
And Paul was about to open his mouth
When Achaia's Deputy spoke :—

'Whether the God descend from above
Or the man ascend upon high,
Whether this maker of tents be Jove
Or a younger deity—
I will be no judge between your gods
And your godless bickerings,
Lictor, drive them hence with rods—
I care for none of these things !

'Were it a question of lawful due
Or a labourer's hire denied,
Reason would I should bear with you
And order it well to be tried :
But this is a question of words and names
And I know the strife it brings,
I will not pass upon any your claims.
I care for none of these things.



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'One thing only I see most clear,

As I pray you also see.

Claudius Cæsar hath set me here

Rome's Deputy to be.

It is Her peace that ye go to break—

Not mine, nor any king's,

But, touching your clamour of "conscience sake,"

I care for none of these things !'

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ON an evening after Easter Day, I sat at a table in a homeward bound steamer's smoking-room, where half a dozen of us told ghost stories. As our party broke up, a man, playing Patience in the next alcove, said to me: 'I didn't quite catch the end of that last story about the Curse on the family's first-born.'

'It turned out to be drains,' I explained. 'As soon as new ones were put into the house the Curse was lifted, I believe. I never knew the people myself.'

'Ah! I've had *my* drains up twice; I'm on gravel too.'

'You don't mean to say you've a ghost in your house? Why didn't you join our party?'

'Any more orders, gentlemen, before the bar closes?' the steward interrupted.

'Sit down again and have one with me,' said the Patience player. 'No, it isn't a ghost.'

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Our trouble is more depression than anything else.'

'How interesting! Then it's nothing any one can see?'

'It's—it's nothing worse than a little depression. And the odd part is that there hasn't been a death in the house since it was built—in 1863. The lawyer said so. That decided me—my good lady, rather—and he made me pay an extra thousand for it.'

'How curious. Unusual, too!' I said.

'Yes, ain't it? It was built for three sisters—Moultrie was the name—three old maids. They all lived together; the eldest owned it. I bought it from her lawyer a few years ago, and if I've spent a pound on the place first and last, I must have spent five thousand. Electric light, new servants' wing, garden—all that sort of thing. A man and his family ought to be happy after so much expense, ain't it?' He looked at me through the bottom of his glass.

'Does it affect your family much?'

'My good lady—she's a Greek by the way—and myself are middle-aged. We can bear up against depression; but it's hard on my little girl. I say little; but she's twenty. We send her visiting to escape it. She almost lived at hotels and hydros last year, but that isn't pleasant for her. She used to be a canary—a perfect canary—always singing.

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You ought to hear her. She doesn't sing now. That sort of thing's unwholesome for the young, ain't it ?'

'Can't you get rid of the place ?' I suggested.

'Not except at a sacrifice, and we are fond of it. Just suits us three. We'd love it if we were allowed.'

'What do you mean by not being allowed ?'

'I mean because of the depression. It spoils everything.'

'What's it like exactly ?'

'I couldn't very well explain. It must be seen to be appreciated, as the auctioneers say. Now, I was much impressed by the story you were telling just now.'

'It wasn't true,' I said.

'My tale is true. If you would do me the pleasure to come down and spend a night at my little place, you'd learn more than you would if I talked till morning. Very likely 'twouldn't touch your good self at all. You might be—immune, ain't it ? On the other hand, if this influenza-influence *does* happen to affect you, why, I think it will be an experience.'

While he talked he gave me his card, and I read his name was L. Maxwell M'Leod, Esq., of Holmescroft. A City address was tucked away in a corner.

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'My business,' he added, 'used to be furs. If you are interested in furs—I've given thirty years of my life to 'em.'

'You're very kind,' I murmured.

'Far from it, I assure you. I can meet you next Saturday afternoon anywhere in London you choose to name, and I'll be only too happy to motor you down. It ought to be a delightful run at this time of year—the rhododendrons will be out. I mean it. You don't know how truly I mean it. Very probably—it won't affect you at all. And—I think I may say I have the finest collection of narwhal tusks in the world. All the best skins and horns have to go through London, and L. Maxwell M'Leod, he knows where they come from, and where they go to. That's his business.'

For the rest of the voyage up-channel Mr. M'Leod talked to me of the assembling, preparation, and sale of the rarer furs; and told me things about the manufacture of fur-lined coats which quite shocked me. Somehow or other, when we landed on Wednesday, I found myself pledged to spend that week-end with him at Holmescroft.

On Saturday he met me with a well-groomed motor, and ran me out in an hour-and-a-half to an exclusive residential district of dustless roads and elegantly designed country villas, each standing in from three to five acres of perfectly appointed land.

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He told me land was selling at eight hundred pounds the acre, and the new golf links, whose Queen Anne pavilion we passed, had cost nearly twenty-four thousand pounds to create.

Holmescroft was a large, two-storied, low, creeper-covered residence. A veranda at the south side gave on to a garden and two tennis courts, separated by a tasteful iron fence from a most park-like meadow of five or six acres, where two Jersey cows grazed. Tea was ready in the shade of a promising copper beech, and I could see groups on the lawn of young men and maidens appropriately clothed, playing lawn tennis in the sunshine.

‘A pretty scene, ain’t it?’ said Mr. M’Leod. ‘My good lady’s sitting under the tree, and that’s my little girl in pink on the far court. But I’ll take you to your room, and you can see ’em all later.’

He led me through a wide parquet-floored hall furnished in pale lemon, with huge cloisonné vases, an ebonised and gold grand piano, and banks of pot flowers in Benares brass bowls, up a pale oak staircase to a spacious landing, where there was a green velvet settee trimmed with silver. The blinds were down, and the light lay in parallel lines on the floors.

He showed me my room, saying cheerfully :

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'You may be a little tired. One often is without knowing it after a run through traffic. Don't come down till you feel quite restored. We shall all be in the garden.'

My room was rather close, and smelt of perfumed soap. I threw up the window at once, but it opened so close to the floor and worked so clumsily that I came within an ace of pitching out, where I should certainly have ruined a rather lop-sided laburnum below. As I set about washing off the journey's dust, I began to feel a little tired. But, I reflected, I had not come down here in this weather and among these new surroundings to be depressed, so I began to whistle.

And it was just then that I was aware of a little grey shadow, as it might have been a snowflake seen against the light, floating at an immense distance in the background of my brain. It annoyed me, and I shook my head to get rid of it. Then my brain telegraphed that it was the forerunner of a swift-striding gloom which there was yet time to escape if I would force my thoughts away from it, as a man leaping for life forces his body forward and away from the fall of a wall. But the gloom overtook me before I could take in the meaning of the message. I moved toward the bed, every nerve already aching with the foreknowledge of the pain that

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was to be dealt it, and sat down, while my amazed and angry soul dropped, gulf by gulf, into that horror of great darkness which is spoken of in the Bible, and which, as auctioneers say, must be experienced to be appreciated.

Despair upon despair, misery upon misery, fear after fear, each causing their distinct and separate woe, packed in upon me for an unrecorded length of time, until at last they blurred together, and I heard a click in my brain like the click in the ear when one descends in a diving bell, and I knew that the pressures were equalised within and without, and that, for the moment, the worst was at an end. But I knew also that at any moment the darkness might come down anew; and while I dwelt on this speculation precisely as a man torments a raging tooth with his tongue, it ebbed away into the little grey shadow on the brain of its first coming, and once more I heard my brain, which knew what would recur, telegraph to every quarter for help, release, or diversion.

The door opened, and M'Leod reappeared. I thanked him politely, saying I was charmed with my room, anxious to meet Mrs. M'Leod, much refreshed with my wash, and so on and so forth. Beyond a little stickiness at the corners of my mouth, it seemed to me that I was

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managing my words admirably, the while that I myself cowered at the bottom of unclimbable pits. M'Leod laid his hand on my shoulder, and said: 'You've got it now already, ain't it?'

'Yes,' I answered, 'it's making me sick!'

'It will pass off when you come outside. I give you my word it will then pass off. Come!'

I shambled out behind him, and wiped my forehead in the hall.

'You mustn't mind,' he said. 'I expect the run tired you. My good lady is sitting there under the copper beech.'

She was a fat woman in an apricot-coloured gown, with a heavily powdered face, against which her black long-lashed eyes showed like currants in dough. I was introduced to many fine ladies and gentlemen of those parts. Magnificently appointed landaus and covered motors swept in and out of the drive, and the air was gay with the merry outcries of the tennis players.

As twilight drew on they all went away, and I was left alone with Mr. and Mrs. M'Leod, while tall men-servants and maid-servants took away the tennis and tea things. Miss M'Leod had walked a little down the drive with a light-haired young man, who apparently knew everything about every South American railway stock. He had told

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me at tea that these were the days of financial specialisation.

'I think it went off beautifully, my dear,' said Mr. M'Leod to his wife; and to me: 'You feel all right now, ain't it? Of course you do.'

Mrs. M'Leod surged across the gravel. Her husband skipped nimbly before her into the south veranda, turned a switch, and all Holmescroft was flooded with light.

'You can do that from your room also,' he said as they went in. 'There is something in money, ain't it?'

Miss M'Leod came up behind me in the dusk. 'We have not yet been introduced,' she said, 'but I suppose you are staying the night?'

'Your father was kind enough to ask me,' I replied.

She nodded. 'Yes, I know; and you know too, don't you? I saw your face when you came to shake hands with mamma. You felt the depression very soon. It is simply frightful in that bedroom sometimes. What do you think it is—bewitchment? In Greece, where I was a little girl, it might have been; but not in England, do you think? Or *do* you?'

'I don't know what to think,' I replied. 'I never felt anything like it. Does it happen often?'

'Yes, sometimes. It comes and goes.'



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‘Pleasant!’ I said, as we walked up and down the gravel at the lawn edge. ‘What has been your experience of it?’

‘That is difficult to say, but—sometimes that—that depression is like as it were’—she gesticulated in most un-English fashion—‘a light. Yes, like a light turned into a room—only a light of blackness, do you understand?—into a happy room. For sometimes we are so happy, all we three,—so very happy. Then this blackness, it is turned on us just like—ah, I know what I mean now—like the head-lamp of a motor, and we are eclipsed. And there is another thing——’

The dressing gong roared, and we entered the over-lighted hall. My dressing was a brisk athletic performance, varied with outbursts of song—careful attention paid to articulation and expression. But nothing happened. As I hurried downstairs, I thanked Heaven that nothing had happened.

Dinner was served breakfast fashion; the dishes were placed on the sideboard over heaters, and we helped ourselves.

‘We always do this when we are alone, so we talk better,’ said Mr. M’Leod.

‘And we are always alone,’ said the daughter.

‘Cheer up, Thea. It will all come right,’ he insisted.

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‘No, papa.’ She shook her dark head. ‘Nothing is right while *it* comes.’

‘It is nothing that we ourselves have ever done in our lives—that I will swear to you,’ said Mrs. M’Leod suddenly. ‘And we have changed our servants several times. So we know it is not *them*.’

‘Never mind. Let us enjoy ourselves while we can,’ said Mr. M’Leod, opening the champagne.

But we did not enjoy ourselves. The talk failed. There were long silences.

‘I beg your pardon,’ I said, for I thought some one at my elbow was about to speak.

‘Ah! That is the other thing!’ said Miss M’Leod. Her mother groaned.

We were silent again, and, in a few seconds it must have been, a live grief beyond words—not ghostly dread or horror, but aching, helpless grief—overwhelmed us, each, I felt, according to his or her nature, and held steady like the beam of a burning-glass. Behind that pain I was conscious there was a desire on somebody’s part to explain something on which some tremendously important issue hung.

Meantime I rolled bread pills and remembered my sins; M’Leod considered his own reflection in a spoon; his wife seemed to be praying, and the girl fidgeted desperately with hands and feet, till the darkness passed on—as though the

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malignant rays of a burning-glass had been shifted from us.

‘There,’ said Miss M’Leod, half rising. ‘Now you see what makes a happy home. Oh, sell it—sell it, father mine, and let us go away!’

‘But I’ve spent thousands on it. You shall go to Harrogate next week, Thea dear.’

‘I’m only just back from hotels. I am *so* tired of packing.’

‘Cheer up, Thea. It is over. You know it does not often come here twice in the same night. I think we shall dare now to be comfortable.’

He lifted a dish-cover, and helped his wife and daughter. His face was lined and fallen like an old man’s after debauch, but his hand did not shake, and his voice was clear. As he worked to restore us by speech and action, he reminded me of a grey-muzzled collie herding demoralised sheep.

After dinner we sat round the dining-room fire—the drawing-room might have been under the Shadow for aught we knew—talking with the intimacy of gipsies by the wayside, or of wounded comparing notes after a skirmish. By eleven o’clock the three between them had given me every name and detail they could recall that in any way bore on the house, and what they knew of its history.

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We went to bed in a fortifying blaze of electric light. My one fear was that the blasting gust of depression would return—the surest way, of course, to bring it. I lay awake till dawn, breathing quickly and sweating lightly, beneath what De Quincey inadequately describes as ‘the oppression of inexpressible guilt.’ Now as soon as the lovely day was broken, I fell into the most terrible of all dreams—that joyous one in which all past evil has not only been wiped out of our lives, but has never been committed; and in the very bliss of our assured innocence, before our loves shriek and change countenance, we wake to the day we have earned.

It was a coolish morning, but we preferred to breakfast in the south veranda. The forenoon we spent in the garden, pretending to play games that come out of boxes, such as croquet and clock golf. But most of the time we drew together and talked. The young man who knew all about South American railways took Miss M’Leod for a walk in the afternoon, and at five M’Leod thoughtfully whirled us all up to dine in town.

‘Now, don’t say you will tell the Psychological Society, and that you will come again,’ said Miss M’Leod, as we parted. ‘Because I know you will not.’

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‘You should not say that,’ said her mother. ‘You should say, “Good-bye, Mr. Perseus. Come again.”’

‘Not him!’ the girl cried. ‘He has seen the Medusa’s head!’

Looking at myself in the restaurant’s mirrors, it seemed to me that I had not much benefited by my week-end. Next morning I wrote out all my Holmescroft notes at fullest length, in the hope that by so doing I could put it all behind me. But the experience worked on my mind, as they say certain imperfectly understood rays work on the body.

I am less calculated to make a Sherlock Holmes than any man I know, for I lack both method and patience, yet the idea of following up the trouble to its source fascinated me. I had no theory to go on, except a vague idea that I had come between two poles of a discharge, and had taken a shock meant for some one else. This was followed by a feeling of intense irritation. I waited cautiously on myself, expecting to be overtaken by horror of the supernatural, but my self persisted in being humanly indignant, exactly as though it had been the victim of a practical joke. It was in great pains and upheavals—that I felt in every fibre—but its dominant idea, to put it coarsely, was to get

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back a bit of its own. By this I knew that I might go forward if I could find the way.

After a few days it occurred to me to go to the office of Mr. J. M. M. Baxter—the solicitor who had sold Holmescroft to M'Leod. I explained I had some notion of buying the place. Would he act for me in the matter?

Mr. Baxter, a large, greyish, throaty-voiced man, showed no enthusiasm. 'I sold it to Mr. M'Leod,' he said. 'It 'ud scarcely do for me to start on the running-down tack now. But I can recommend——'

'I know he's asking an awful price,' I interrupted, 'and atop of it he wants an extra thousand for what he calls your clean bill of health.'

Mr. Baxter sat up in his chair. I had all his attention.

'Your guarantee with the house. Don't you remember it?'

'Yes, yes. That no death had taken place in the house since it was built. I remember perfectly.'

He did not gulp as untrained men do when they lie, but his jaws moved stickily, and his eyes, turning towards the deed boxes on the wall, dulled. I counted seconds, one, two, three—one, two, three—up to ten. A man, I knew, can live through ages of mental depression in that time.

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‘I remember perfectly.’ His mouth opened a little as though it had tasted old bitterness.

‘Of course *that* sort of thing doesn’t appeal to me.’ I went on. ‘I don’t expect to buy a house free from death.’

‘Certainly not. No one does. But it was Mr. M’Leod’s fancy—his wife’s rather, I believe; and since we could meet it—it was my duty to my clients—at whatever cost to my own feelings—to make him pay.’

‘That’s really why I came to you. I understood from him you knew the place well.’

‘Oh yes. Always did. It originally belonged to some connections of mine.’

‘The Misses Moultrie, I suppose. How interesting! They must have loved the place before the country round about was built up.’

‘They were very fond of it indeed.’

‘I don’t wonder. So restful and sunny. I don’t see how they could have brought themselves to part with it.’

Now it is one of the most constant peculiarities of the English that in polite conversation—and I had striven to be polite—no one ever does or sells anything for mere money’s sake.

‘Miss Agnes—the youngest—fell ill’ (he spaced his words a little), ‘and, as they were very much attached to each other, that broke up the home.’

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‘Naturally. I fancied it must have been something of that kind. One doesn’t associate the Staffordshire Moultries’ (my Demon of Irresponsibility at that instant created ’em), ‘with—with being hard up.’

‘I don’t know whether we’re related to them,’ he answered importantly. ‘We may be, for our branch of the family comes from the Midlands.’

I give this talk at length, because I am so proud of my first attempt at detective work. When I left him, twenty minutes later, with instructions to move against the owner of Holmescroft with a view to purchase, I was more bewildered than any Doctor Watson at the opening of a story.

Why should a middle-aged solicitor turn plover’s egg colour and drop his jaw when reminded of so innocent and festal a matter as that no death had ever occurred in a house that he had sold? If I knew my English vocabulary at all, the tone in which he said the youngest sister ‘fell ill’ meant that she had gone out of her mind. That might explain his change of countenance, and it was just possible that her demented influence still hung about Holmescroft; but the rest was beyond me.

I was relieved when I reached M’Leod’s City office, and could tell him what I had done—not what I thought.

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M'Leod was quite willing to enter into the game of the pretended purchase, but did not see how it would help if I knew Baxter.

'He's the only living soul I can get at who was connected with Holmescroft,' I said.

'Ah! Living soul is good,' said M'Leod. 'At any rate our little girl will be pleased that you are still interested in us. Won't you come down some day this week?'

'How is it there now?' I asked.

He screwed up his face. 'Simply frightful!' he said. 'Thea is at Droitwich.'

'I should like it immensely, but I must cultivate Baxter for the present. You'll be sure and keep him busy your end, won't you?'

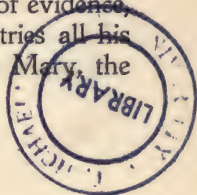
He looked at me with quiet contempt. 'Do not be afraid. I shall be a good Jew. I shall be my own solicitor.'

Before a fortnight was over, Baxter admitted ruefully that M'Leod was better than most firms in the business. We buyers were coy, argumentative, shocked at the price of Holmescroft, inquisitive, and cold by turns, but Mr. M'Leod the seller easily met and surpassed us; and Mr. Baxter entered every letter, telegram, and consultation at the proper rates in a cinematograph-film of a bill. At the end of a month he said it looked as though M'Leod, thanks to him, were really going to listen

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to reason. I was many pounds out of pocket, but I had learned something of Mr. Baxter on the human side. I deserved it. Never in my life have I worked to conciliate, amuse, and flatter a human being as I worked over my solicitor.

It appeared that he golfed. Therefore, I was an enthusiastic beginner, anxious to learn. Twice I invaded his office with a bag (M'Leod lent it) full of the spelicans needed in this detestable game, and a vocabulary to match. The third time the ice broke, and Mr. Baxter took me to his links, quite ten miles off, where in a maze of tramway lines, railroads, and nursery-maids, we skelped our divoted way round nine holes like barges plunging through head seas. He played vilely and had never expected to meet any one worse; but as he realised my form, I think he began to like me, for he took me in hand by the two hours together. After a fortnight he could give me no more than a stroke a hole, and when, with this allowance, I once managed to beat him by one, he was honestly glad, and assured me that I should be a golfer if I stuck to it. I was sticking to it for my own ends, but now and again my conscience pricked me; for the man was a nice man. Between games he supplied me with odd pieces of evidence, such as that he had known the Moultries all his life, being their cousin, and that Miss Mary, the



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eldest, was an unforgiving woman who would never let bygones be. I naturally wondered what she might have against him; and somehow connected him unfavourably with mad Agnes.

‘People ought to forgive and forget,’ he volunteered one day between rounds. ‘Specially where, in the nature of things, they can’t be sure of their deductions. Don’t you think so?’

‘It all depends on the nature of the evidence on which one forms one’s judgment,’ I answered.

‘Nonsense!’ he cried. ‘I’m lawyer enough to know that there’s nothing in the world so misleading as circumstantial evidence. Never was.’

‘Why? Have you ever seen men hanged on it?’

‘Hanged? People have been supposed to be eternally lost on it,’ his face turned grey again. ‘I don’t know how it is with you, but my consolation is that God must know. He *must*! Things that seem on the face of ’em like murder, or say suicide, may appear different to God. Heh?’

‘That’s what the murderer and the suicide can always hope—I suppose.’

‘I have expressed myself clumsily as usual. The facts as God knows ’em—may *be* different—even after the most clinching evidence. I’ve always said that—both as a lawyer and a man, but some people won’t—I don’t want to judge ’em—

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we'll say they can't—believe it; whereas *I* say there's always a working chance—a certainty—that the worst hasn't happened.' He stopped and cleared his throat. 'Now, let's come on! This time next week I shall be taking my holiday.'

'What links?' I asked carelessly, while twins in a perambulator got out of our line of fire.

'A potty little nine-hole affair at a Hydro in the Midlands. My cousins stay there. Always will. Not but what the fourth and the seventh holes take some doing. You could manage it, though,' he said encouragingly. 'You're doing much better. It's only your approach shots that are weak.'

'You're right. I can't approach for nuts! I shall go to pieces while you're away—with no one to coach me,' I said mournfully.

'I haven't taught you anything,' he said, delighted with the compliment.

'I owe all I've learned to you, anyhow. When will you come back?'

'Look here,' he began. 'I don't know your engagements, but I've no one to play with at Burry Mills. Never have. Why couldn't you take a few days off and join me there? I warn you it will be rather dull. It's a throat and gout place—baths, massage, electricity, and so forth. But the fourth and the seventh holes really take some doing.'

'I'm for the game,' I answered valiantly,

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Heaven well knowing that I hated every stroke and word of it.

‘That’s the proper spirit. As their lawyer I must ask you not to say anything to my cousins about Holmescroft. It upsets ’em. Always did. But speaking as man to man, it would be very pleasant for me if you could see your way to——’

I saw it as soon as decency permitted, and thanked him sincerely. According to my now well-developed theory he had certainly misappropriated his aged cousins’ monies under power of attorney, and had probably driven poor Agnes Moultrie out of her wits, but I wished that he was not so gentle, and good-tempered, and innocent-eyed.

Before I joined him at Burry Mills Hydro, I spent a night at Holmescroft. Miss M’Leod had returned from her Hydro, and first we made very merry on the open lawn in the sunshine over the manners and customs of the English resorting to such places. She knew dozens of hydros, and warned me how to behave in them, while Mr. and Mrs. M’Leod stood aside and adored her.

‘Ah! That’s the way she always comes back to us,’ he said. ‘Pity it wears off so soon, ain’t it? You ought to hear her sing “With mirth, thou pretty bird.”’

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We had the house to face through the evening, and there we neither laughed nor sang. The gloom fell on us as we entered, and did not shift till ten o'clock, when we crawled out, as it were, from beneath it.

'It has been bad this summer,' said Mrs. M'Leod in a whisper after we realised that we were freed. 'Sometimes I think the house will get up and cry out—it is so bad.'

'How?'

'Have you forgotten what comes after the depression?'

So then we waited about the small fire, and the dead air in the room presently filled and pressed down upon us with the sensation (but words are useless here) as though some dumb and bound power were striving against gag and bond to deliver its soul of an articulate word. It passed in a few minutes, and I fell to thinking about Mr. Baxter's conscience and Agnes Moultrie, gone mad in the well-lit bedroom that waited me. These reflections secured me a night during which I rediscovered how, from purely mental causes, a man can be physically sick; but the sickness was bliss compared to my dreams when the birds waked. On my departure, M'Leod gave me a beautiful narwhal's horn, much as a nurse gives a child sweets for being brave at a dentist's.

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'There's no duplicate of it in the world,' he said, 'else it would have come to old Max M'Leod,' and he tucked it into the motor. Miss M'Leod on the far side of the car whispered, 'Have you found out anything, Mr. Perseus?'

I shook my head.

'Then I shall be chained to my rock all my life,' she went on. 'Only don't tell papa.'

I supposed she was thinking of the young gentleman who specialised in South American rails, for I noticed a ring on the third finger of her left hand.

I went straight from that house to Burry Mills Hydro, keen for the first time in my life on playing golf, which is guaranteed to occupy the mind. Baxter had taken me a room communicating with his own, and after lunch introduced me to a tall, horse-headed elderly lady of decided manners, whom a white-haired maid pushed along in a bath-chair through the park-like grounds of the Hydro. She was Miss Mary Moultrie, and she coughed and cleared her throat just like Baxter. She suffered—she told me it was the Moultrie caste-mark—from some obscure form of chronic bronchitis, complicated with spasm of the glottis; and, in a dead flat voice, with a sunken eye that looked and saw not, told me what washes, gargles, pastilles, and inhalations she had proved most beneficial.

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From her I was passed on to her younger sister, Miss Elizabeth, a small and withered thing with twitching lips, victim, she told me, to very much the same sort of throat, but secretly devoted to another set of medicines. When she went away with Baxter and the bath-chair, I fell across a major of the Indian army with gout in his glassy eyes, and a stomach which he had taken all round the Continent. He laid everything before me; and him I escaped only to be confided in by a matron with a tendency to follicular tonsilitis and eczema. Baxter waited hand and foot on his cousins till five o'clock, trying, as I saw, to atone for his treatment of the dead sister. Miss Mary ordered him about like a dog.

'I warned you it would be dull,' he said when we met in the smoking-room.

'It's tremendously interesting,' I said. 'But how about a look round the links?'

'Unluckily damp always affects my eldest cousin. I've got to buy her a new bronchitis-kettle. Arthurs broke her old one yesterday.'

We slipped out to the chemist's shop in the town, and he bought a large glittering tin thing whose workings he explained.

'I'm used to this sort of work. I come up here pretty often,' he said. 'I've the family throat too.'

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‘You’re a good man,’ I said. ‘A very good man.’

He turned towards me in the evening light among the beeches, and his face was changed to what it might have been a generation before.

‘You see,’ he said huskily, ‘there was the youngest—Agnes. Before she fell ill, you know. But she didn’t like leaving her sisters. Never would.’ He hurried on with his odd-shaped load and left me among the ruins of my black theories. The man with that face had done Agnes Moultrie no wrong.

We never played our game. I was waked between two and three in the morning from my hygienic bed by Baxter in an ulster over orange and white pyjamas, which I should never have suspected from his character.

‘My cousin has had some sort of a seizure,’ he said. ‘Will you come? I don’t want to wake the doctor. Don’t want to make a scandal. Quick!’

So I came quickly, and led by the white-haired Arthurs in a jacket and petticoat, entered a double-bedded room reeking with steam and Friar’s Balsam. The electrics were all on. Miss Mary—I knew her by her height—was at the open window, wrestling with Miss Elizabeth, who gripped her round the knees. Her hand was at her throat, which was streaked with blood.

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'She's done it. She's done it too!' Miss Elizabeth panted. 'Hold her! Help me!'

'Oh, I say! Women don't cut their throats,' Baxter whispered.

'My God! Has she cut her throat?' the maid cried, and with no warning rolled over in a faint. Baxter pushed her under the wash-basins, and leaped to hold the gaunt woman who crowed and whistled as she struggled towards the window. He took her by the shoulder, and she struck out wildly.

'All right! She's only cut her hand,' he said. 'Wet towel—quick!'

While I got that he pushed her backward. Her strength seemed almost as great as his. I swabbed at her throat when I could, and found no mark; then helped him to control her a little. Miss Elizabeth leaped back to bed, wailing like a child.

'Tie up her hand somehow,' said Baxter. 'Don't let it drip about the place. She'—he stepped on broken glass in his slippers, 'she must have smashed a pane.'

Miss Mary lurched towards the open window again, dropped on her knees, her head on the sill, and lay quiet, surrendering the cut hand to me.

'What did she do?' Baxter turned towards Miss Elizabeth in the far bed.

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'She was going to throw herself out of the window,' was the answer. 'I stopped her, and sent Arthurs for you. Oh, we can never hold up our heads again!'

Miss Mary writhed and fought for breath. Baxter found a shawl which he threw over her shoulders.

'Nonsense!' said he. 'That isn't like Mary'; but his face worked when he said it.

'You wouldn't believe about Aggie, John. Perhaps you will now!' said Miss Elizabeth. 'I *saw* her do it, and she's cut her throat too!'

'She hasn't,' I said. 'It's only her hand.'

Miss Mary suddenly broke from us with an indescribable grunt, flew, rather than ran, to her sister's bed, and there shook her as one furious schoolgirl would shake another.

'No such thing,' she croaked. 'How dare you think so, you wicked little fool?'

'Get into bed, Mary,' said Baxter. 'You'll catch a chill.'

She obeyed, but sat up with the grey shawl round her lean shoulders, glaring at her sister. 'I'm better now,' she crowed. 'Arthurs let me sit out too long. Where's Arthurs? The kettle.'

'Never mind Arthurs,' said Baxter. 'You get the kettle.' I hastened to bring it from the side

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table. 'Now Mary, as God sees you, tell me what you've done.'

His lips were dry, and he could not moisten them with his tongue.

Miss Mary applied herself to the mouth of the kettle, and between indraws of steam said: 'The spasm came on just now, while I was asleep. I was nearly choking to death. So I went to the window. I've done it often before, without waking any one. Bessie's such an old maid about draughts. I tell you I was choking to death. I couldn't manage the catch, and I nearly fell out. That window opens too low. I cut my hand trying to save myself. Who has tied it up in this filthy handkerchief? I wish you had had my throat, Bessie. I never was nearer dying!' She scowled on us all impartially, while her sister sobbed.

From the bottom of the bed we heard a quivering voice: 'Is she dead? Have they took her away? Oh, I never could bear the sight o' blood!'

'Arthurs,' said Miss Mary, 'you are an hireling. Go away!'

It is my belief that Arthurs crawled out on all fours, but I was busy picking up broken glass from the carpet.

Then Baxter, seated by the side of the bed,

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began to cross-examine in a voice I scarcely recognised. No one could for an instant have doubted the genuine rage of Miss Mary against her sister, her cousin, or her maid; and that the doctor should have been called in—for she did me the honour of calling me doctor—was the last drop. She was choking with her throat; had rushed to the window for air; had near pitched out, and in catching at the window bars had cut her hand. Over and over she made this clear to the intent Baxter. Then she turned on her sister and tongue-lashed her savagely.

‘You mustn’t blame me,’ Miss Bessie faltered at last. ‘You know what we think of night and day.’

‘I’m coming to that,’ said Baxter. ‘Listen to me. What *you* did, Mary, misled four people into thinking you—you meant to do away with yourself.’

‘Isn’t one suicide in the family enough? Oh God, help and pity us! You *couldn’t* have believed that!’ she cried.

‘The evidence was complete. Now, don’t you think,’ Baxter’s finger wagged under her nose—‘*can’t* you think that poor Aggie did the same thing at Holmescroft when she fell out of the window?’

‘She had the same throat,’ said Miss Elizabeth.

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‘Exactly the same symptoms. Don’t you remember, Mary?’

‘Which was her bedroom?’ I asked of Baxter in an undertone.

‘Over the south veranda, looking on to the tennis lawn.’

‘I nearly fell out of that very window when I was at Holmescroft—opening it to get some air. The sill doesn’t come much above your knees,’ I said.

‘You hear that, Mary? Mary, do you hear what this gentleman says? Won’t you believe that what nearly happened to you must have happened to poor Aggie that night? For God’s sake—for her sake—Mary, *won’t* you believe?’

There was a long silence while the steam kettle puffed.

‘If I could have proof—if I could have proof,’ said she, and broke into most horrible tears.

Baxter motioned to me, and I crept away to my room, and lay awake till morning, thinking more specially of the dumb Thing at Holmescroft which wished to explain itself. I hated Miss Mary as perfectly as though I had known her for twenty years, but I felt that, alive or dead, I should not like her to condemn me.

Yet at mid-day, when I saw Miss Mary in her

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bath-chair, Arthurs behind and Baxter and Miss Elizabeth on either side, in the park-like grounds of the Hydro, I found it difficult to arrange my words.

‘Now that you know all about it,’ said Baxter aside, after the first strangeness of our meeting was over, ‘it’s only fair to tell you that my poor cousin did not die in Holmescroft at all. She was dead when they found her under the window in the morning. Just dead.’

‘Under that laburnum outside the window?’ I asked, for I suddenly remembered the crooked evil thing.

‘Exactly. She broke the tree in falling. But no death has ever taken place *in* the house, so far as we were concerned. You can make yourself quite easy on that point. Mr. M’Leod’s extra thousand for what you called the “clean bill of health” was something towards my cousins’ estate when we sold. It was my duty as their lawyer to get it for them—at any cost to my own feelings.’

I know better than to argue when the English talk about their duty. So I agreed with my solicitor.

‘Their sister’s death must have been a great blow to your cousins,’ I went on. The bath-chair was behind me.

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‘Unspeakable,’ Baxter whispered. ‘They brooded on it day and night. No wonder. If their theory of poor Aggie making away with herself was correct, she was eternally lost!’

‘Do you believe that she made away with herself?’

‘No, thank God! Never have! And after what happened to Mary last night, I see perfectly what happened to poor Aggie. She had the family throat too. By the way, Mary thinks you are a doctor. Otherwise she wouldn’t like your having been in her room.’

‘Very good. Is she convinced now about her sister’s death?’

‘She’d give anything to be able to believe it, but she’s a hard woman, and brooding along certain lines makes one groovy. I have sometimes been afraid for her reason—on the religious side, don’t you know. Elizabeth doesn’t matter. Brain of a hen. Always had.’

Here Arthurs summoned me to the bath-chair, and the ravaged face, beneath its knitted Shetland wool hood, of Miss Mary Moultrie.

‘I need not remind you, I hope, of the seal of secrecy—absolute secrecy—in your profession,’ she began. ‘Thanks to my cousin’s and my sister’s stupidity, you have found out——’ she blew her nose.

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‘Please don’t excite her, sir,’ said Arthurs at the back.

‘But, my dear Miss Moultrie, I only know what I’ve seen, of course, but it seems to me that what you thought was a tragedy in your sister’s case, turns out, on your own evidence, so to speak, to have been an accident—a dreadfully sad one—but absolutely an accident.’

‘Do you believe that too?’ she cried. ‘Or are you only saying it to comfort me?’

‘I believe it from the bottom of my heart. Come down to Holmescroft for an hour—for half an hour—and satisfy yourself.’

‘Of what? You don’t understand. I see the house every day—every night. I am always there in spirit—waking or sleeping. I couldn’t face it in reality.’

‘But you must,’ I said. ‘If you go there in the spirit the greater need for you to go there in the flesh. Go to your sister’s room once more, and see the window—I nearly fell out of it myself. It’s—it’s awfully low and dangerous. That would convince you,’ I pleaded.

‘Yet Aggie had slept in that room for years,’ she interrupted.

‘You’ve slept in your room here for a long time, haven’t you? But you nearly fell out of the window when you were choking.’

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‘That is true. That is one thing true,’ she nodded. ‘And I might have been killed as—perhaps—Aggie was killed.’

‘In that case your own sister and cousin and maid would have said you had committed suicide, Miss Moultrie. Come down to Holmescroft, and go over the place just once.’

‘You are lying,’ she said quite quietly. ‘You don’t want me to come down to see a window. It is something else. I warn you we are Evangelicals. We don’t believe in prayers for the dead. “As the tree falls——”’

‘Yes. I daresay. But you persist in thinking that your sister committed suicide——’

‘No! No! I have always prayed that I might have misjudged her.’

Arthurs at the bath-chair spoke up: ‘Oh, Miss Mary! you *would* ’ave it from the first that poor Miss Aggie ’ad made away with herself; an’, of course, Miss Bessie took the notion from you. Only Master—Mister John stood out, and—and I’d ’ave taken my Bible oath *you* was making away with yourself last night.’

Miss Mary leaned towards me, one finger on my sleeve.

‘If going to Holmescroft kills me,’ she said, ‘you will have the murder of a fellow-creature on your conscience for all eternity.’

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'I'll risk it,' I answered. Remembering what torment the mere reflection of her torments had cast on Holmescroft, and remembering, above all, the dumb Thing that filled the house with its desire to speak, I felt that there might be worse things.

Baxter was amazed at the proposed visit, but at a nod from that terrible woman went off to make arrangements. Then I sent a telegram to M'Leod bidding him and his vacate Holmescroft for that afternoon. Miss Mary should be alone with her dead, as I had been alone.

I expected untold trouble in transporting her, but to do her justice, the promise given for the journey, she underwent it without murmur, spasm, or unnecessary word. Miss Bessie, pressed in a corner by the window, wept behind her veil, and from time to time tried to take hold of her sister's hand. Baxter wrapped himself in his newly-found happiness as selfishly as a bridegroom, for he sat still and smiled.

'So long as I know that Aggie didn't make away with herself,' he explained, 'I tell you frankly I don't care what happened. She's as hard as a rock—Mary. Always was. *She* won't die.'

We led her out on to the platform like a blind woman, and so got her into the fly. The half-hour crawl to Holmescroft was the most racking

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experience of the day. M'Leod had obeyed my instructions. There was no one visible in the house or the gardens; and the front door stood open.

Miss Mary rose from beside her sister, stepped forth first, and entered the hall.

'Come, Bessie,' she cried.

'I daren't. Oh, I daren't.'

'Come!' Her voice had altered. I felt Baxter start. 'There's nothing to be afraid of.'

'Good heavens!' said Baxter. 'She's running up the stairs. We'd better follow.'

'Let's wait below. She's going to the room.'

We heard the door of the bedroom I knew open and shut, and we waited in the lemon-coloured hall, heavy with the scent of flowers.

'I've never been into it since it was sold,' Baxter sighed. 'What a lovely restful place it is! Poor Aggie used to arrange the flowers.'

'Restful?' I began, but stopped of a sudden, for I felt all over my bruised soul that Baxter was speaking truth. It was a light, spacious, airy house, full of the sense of well-being and peace—above all things, of peace. I ventured into the dining-room where the thoughtful M'Leods had left a small fire. There was no terror there, present or lurking; and in the drawing-room, which for good reasons we had never cared to

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enter, the sun and the peace and the scent of the flowers worked together as is fit in an inhabited house. When I returned to the hall, Baxter was sweetly asleep on a couch, looking most unlike a middle-aged solicitor who had spent a broken night with an exacting cousin.

There was ample time for me to review it all—to felicitate myself upon my magnificent acumen (barring some errors about Baxter as a thief and possibly a murderer), before the door above opened, and Baxter, evidently a light sleeper, sprang awake.

‘I’ve had a heavenly little nap,’ he said, rubbing his eyes with the backs of his hands like a child. ‘Good Lord! That’s not *their* step!’

But it was. I had never before been privileged to see the Shadow turned backward on the dial—the years ripped bodily off poor human shoulders—old sunken eyes filled and alight—harsh lips moistened and human.

‘John,’ Miss Mary called, ‘I know now. Aggie didn’t do it!’ and ‘She didn’t do it!’ echoed Miss Bessie, and giggled.

‘I did not think it wrong to say a prayer,’ Miss Mary continued. ‘Not for her soul, but for our peace. Then I was convinced.’

‘Then we got conviction,’ the younger sister piped.

THE HOUSE SURGEON

'We've misjudged poor Aggie, John. But I feel she knows now. Wherever she is, she knows that we know she is guiltless.'

'Yes, she knows. I felt it too,' said Miss Elizabeth.

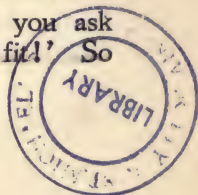
'I never doubted,' said John Baxter, whose face was beautiful at that hour. 'Not from the first. Never have!'

'You never offered me proof, John. Now, thank God, it will not be the same any more. I can think henceforward of Aggie without sorrow.' She tripped, absolutely tripped, across the hall. 'What ideas these Jews have of arranging furniture!' She spied me behind a big cloisonné vase.

'I've seen the window,' she said remotely. 'You took a great risk in advising me to undertake such a journey. However, as it turns out . . . I forgive you, and I pray you may never know what mental anguish means! Bessie! Look at this peculiar piano! Do you suppose, Doctor, these people would offer one tea? I miss mine.'

'I will go and see,' I said, and explored M'Leod's new-built servants' wing. It was in the servants' hall that I unearthed the M'Leod family, bursting with anxiety.

'Tea for three, quick,' I said. 'If you ask me any questions now, I shall have a fit!'



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Mrs. M'Leod got it, and I was butler, amid murmured apologies from Baxter, still smiling and self-absorbed, and the cold disapproval of Miss Mary, who thought the pattern of the china vulgar. However, she ate well, and even asked me whether I would not like a cup of tea for myself.

They went away in the twilight—the twilight that I had once feared. They were going to an hotel in London to rest after the fatigues of the day, and as their fly turned down the drive, I capered on the doorstep, with the all-darkened house behind me.

Then I heard the uncertain feet of the M'Leods, and bade them not to turn on the lights, but to feel—to feel what I had done; for the Shadow was gone, with the dumb desire in the air. They drew short, but afterwards deeper, breaths, like bathers entering chill water, separated one from the other, moved about the hall, tiptoed upstairs, raced down, and then Miss M'Leod, and I believe her mother, though she denies this, embraced me. I know M'Leod did.

It was a disgraceful evening. To say we rioted through the house is to put it mildly. We played a sort of Blind Man's Buff along the darkest passages, in the unlighted drawing-room, and little dining-room, calling cheerily to each other after

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each exploration that here, and here, and here, the trouble had removed itself. We came up to *the* bedroom—mine for the night again—and sat, the women on the bed, and we men on chairs, drinking in blessed draughts of peace and comfort and cleanliness of soul, while I told them my tale in full, and received fresh praise, thanks, and blessings.

When the servants, returned from their day's outing, gave us a supper of cold fried fish, M'Leod had sense enough to open no wine. We had been practically drunk since nightfall, and grew incoherent on water and milk.

'I like that Baxter,' said M'Leod. 'He's a sharp man. The death wasn't in the house, but he ran it pretty close, ain't it?'

'And the joke of it is that he supposes I want to buy the place from you,' I said. 'Are you selling?'

'Not for twice what I paid for it—now,' said M'Leod. 'I'll keep you in furs all your life, but not our Holmescroft.'

'No—never our Holmescroft,' said Miss M'Leod. 'We'll ask *him* here on Tuesday, mamma.' They squeezed each other's hands.

'Now tell me,' said Mrs. M'Leod—'that tall one I saw out of the scullery window—did *she* tell you she was always here in the spirit? I

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hate her. She made all this trouble. It was not her house after she had sold it. What do you think?’

‘I suppose,’ I answered, ‘she brooded over what she believed was her sister’s suicide night and day—she confessed she did—and her thoughts being concentrated on this place, they felt like a—like a burning glass.’

‘Burning glass is good,’ said M’Leod.

‘I said it was like a light of blackness turned on us,’ cried the girl, twiddling her ring. ‘That must have been when the tall one thought worst about her sister and the house.’

‘Ah, the poor Aggie!’ said Mrs. M’Leod. ‘The poor Aggie, trying to tell every one it was not so! No wonder we felt Something wished to say Something. Thea, Max, do you remember that night——’

‘We need not remember any more,’ M’Leod interrupted. ‘It is not our trouble. They have told each other now.’

‘Do you think, then,’ said Miss M’Leod, ‘that those two, the living ones, were actually told something—upstairs—in your—in the room?’

‘I can’t say. At any rate they were made happy, and they ate a big tea afterwards. As your father says, it is not our trouble any longer—thank God!’

THE HOUSE SURGEON

‘Amen!’ said M’Leod. ‘Now, Thea, let us have some music after all these months. “With mirth, thou pretty bird,” ain’t it? You ought to hear that.’

And in the half-lighted hall, Thea sang an old English song that I had never heard before.

With mirth, thou pretty bird, rejoice
Thy Maker’s praise enhanced;
Lift up thy shrill and pleasant voice,
Thy God is high advanced!
Thy food before He did provide,
And gives it in a fitting side,
Wherewith be thou sufficed!
Why shouldst thou now unpleasant be,
Thy wrath against God venting,
That He a little bird made thee,
Thy silly head tormenting,
Because He made thee not a man?
Oh, Peace! He hath well thought thereon,
Therewith be thou sufficed!

THE RABBI'S SONG

If Thought can reach to Heaven,
On Heaven let it dwell,
For fear that Thought be given
Like power to reach to Hell.
For fear the desolation
And darkness of thy mind,
Perplex an habitation
Which thou hast left behind.

Let nothing linger after—
No whispering ghost remain,
In wall, or beam, or rafter,
Of any hate or pain.
Cleanse and call home thy spirit,
Deny her leave to cast,
On aught thy heirs inherit,
The shadow of her past.

For think, in all thy sadness,
What road our grief may take ;
Whose brain reflect our madness,
Or whom our terrors shake.
For think, lest any languish
By cause of thy distress—
The arrows of our anguish
Fly farther than we guess.

ACTIONS AND REACTIONS

Our lives, our tears, as water,
Are poured upon the ground;
God giveth no man quarter,
Yet God a means hath found;
Though faith and hope have vanished,
And even love grows dim,
A means whereby His banished
Be not expelled from Him !

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